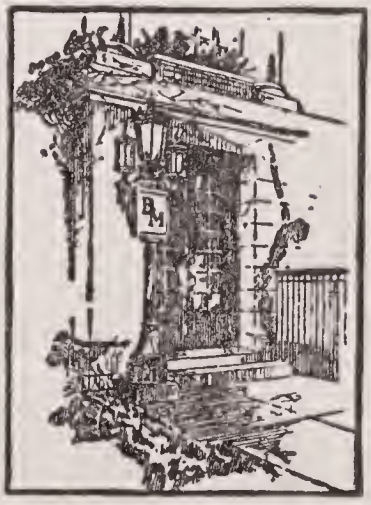
Merry O



OTHER BOOKS BY ETHEL HUESTON

PRUDENCE OF THE PARSONAGE

PRUDENCE SAYS SO

SUNNY SLOPES

LEAVE IT TO DORIS

EVE TO THE RESCUE

LITTLE LADY COMB

He shaved ten years from his appearance

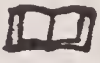
Merry O

By

ETHEL HUESTON

Illustrated by

EDWARD C. CASWELL



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Merry O

Merry O

CHAPTER I

A CASE OF COERCION

"LISTEN, father!"

The Reverend Mr. McAllister was a light sleeper at all times, but it would seem that slumber deep as of the grave itself must yield to the force of that insistent, lilting voice,—and if not to the voice, certainly then to the resounding spring of the bed as, with a flying leap, the lithe young figure landed full in the center of it, or to the stirring vigor of that pair of strong white arms. Mary Martha McAllister in action was not to be denied.

"Listen, father!"

With a low, protesting, yet submissive murmur, her father turned over in bed, and opened his eyes. He was sleepy, he did not want to be disturbed, yet he could but smile at that picture.

It was in the very early morning, all drab and somber, before the faintest hint of rose swept up the eastern sky. And against the drab and somber gray, Mary Martha was a riot of gay color, with her golden tousled curls, her glowing deep-blue eyes, her face all flushed from sleep and from her glad excitement. Clutching a nondescript flannel kimono at her throat, she crouched on her knees in the center of her father's bed, excitedly wriggling her bare pink toes protruding from the faded blue of her kimono.

"Listen, father!" Her voice was low but vibrant with emotion. Mary Martha was always vibrant with emotion of one sort or another,—whether pleasure, pain, a high resolve, a driving hurry, or only girlish merriment—whatever it was, Mary Martha was vibrant with it at the time of its possession of her. "If you were a hen," she said slowly, with impressive dignity, "if you were a hen, and sat yourself down comfortably in a box with a dozen eggs in the nest, in a nice warm corner of the hen-house, and somebody came

along and shooed you off the nest and stole all the eggs, and carried the box away and hid it, and then came back with a broom and drove you out of the hen-house and locked the door and barred the windows,—now, father, what would you think?"

Her father was accustomed to Mary Martha's line of conversation. He laughed and answered promptly, "I should infer that somebody wanted me to get away from that hen-house and stay away."

She nodded with satisfaction. "That's right! You said it the first time! Anybody would! And it is just the same with us. This is the only house in New Paris that isn't occupied,—by anybody but us, I mean. And now they come and say they've got to have it. That turns us out. And then, to make it even stronger, they come and say they've got to have my position, and you know yourself it's the only position in town. So there you are. They took our eggs, took our nest, and now they're shooing us out of the hen-

house forever. Of course, I'm talking in parables, but you know what I mean. The henhouse is New Paris."

"But, Merry O—"

She interrupted quickly. "It seems to me, father, as if the Lord must want us to get away from this town. Don't you think so? I've got to have work, and there's no work here. We've got to have a house, and no house here! Well, then, doesn't it just look as if the Lord decided we'd better move?"

Her father hesitated. This was a powerful argument, as Mary Martha had foreseen, and one he found difficult to answer.

"Of course, if it is indeed—" he began hesitantly.

Mary Martha bounced quickly off the bed, kissed him hastily and patted his head. "Yes, that's what I say. All right, then, we've agreed on that much, haven't we? We'll move; as soon as we possibly can. I think we can be ready to go by the time school is out."

She walked toward the door, an appealing if somewhat ludicrous figure with her triumphant air, her tumbled curls and bare feet, wrapped in the bunglesome flannel kimono. Her hand on the knob, she turned for a moment, her manner that of a conqueror.

"I did it by New Thought, father. It's very simple. When you go to bed at night you say, 'Well, here I am in a nice predicament, but Divine Love will show me the way out in the morning.' Then you go to sleep. And it did. Only it worked faster than I expected and got me up before daylight."

"You might have waited till breakfast," he said plaintively.

"No, that's against the rule. As soon as you get the hunch, I mean, the inspiration, you have to hop to it right away. Oh, I don't mean the slang. I mean, you must embody the inspiration in your plan of action right straight away. That's the rule. It's very clever. Good night."

Mary Martha's conclusion in regard to a move

seemed indeed based on sound logic. In the little town of New Paris, in southeastern Iowa, houses were not built to rent. It was a community in which each man owned his home, and there was scant provision of any kind for transients.

Indeed, there were no transients, with the exception of teachers and preachers. The minister was furnished a parsonage. The teachers lived at a boarding-house.

They had come to New Paris, the family of McAllisters, ten years before, when Mary Martha was a boyish, breezy child of ten, and Theodora a baby in arms. They were sent there by decree of the Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in southeastern Iowa, and took up their residence in the parsonage provided for them, happily, comfortably, orthodoxly. Three years later, Mr. McAllister, never a man of rugged health, had suffered a complete nervous breakdown, and, unable to recuperate his feeble forces, was obliged to give up his little church and suffer

himself to be recorded on the lists of the church as "superannuated."

Afterward, Mary Martha often said, regretfully, that if she had only known as much at the time of the disaster as she knew in later years, she could readily have whipped her father into his old preaching form along the practical healing lines of Auto-Suggestion, Christian Science, Mental Healing, New Thought, or just plain Theotherapy if you wanted to be strictly orthodox.

But unfortunately, at that time, Mary Martha was patiently resigned, along with the rest of the family, to a placid acceptance of illness as not only unavoidable but perhaps a positive disposition of divine providence.

At any rate, they found themselves without a church, and, what was really more disastrous, without a parsonage. But Benjamin Hargood, a kindly intentioned member, put into some semblance of repair a little cottage of his at the edge of town, a cottage he had long since discarded

as unfit for human occupancy, and placed it at the disposal of the unfortunate minister and his family. Regardless of its condition, they were glad to get it, and soon had a comfortable little home established there.

For a time, things went nicely enough. The children continued in the public schools of New Paris, and Mr. McAllister went happily on his way, working almost as hard in the church as he had done before, with the one great difference that now he did it without remuneration, from habit and from love, whereas before there had been a salary, though a meager one. It was upon Mrs. McAllister, as always upon the wife of a minister, that the burden of the new régime fell hardest,—the training of the children, the care of baby Theodora, and the maintenance of a home and a family in a way that measured up to the traditions of ministerial life on funds wholly insufficient. Even her sublime heroism was unequal to the performance, and after a sudden, very brief, very quiet illness, Mrs. Mc-

Allister closed her wearied eyes and abandoned the impossible.

After that, things went steadily down-hill. The small savings dwindled with astonishing rapidity in spite of rigid economy, and the allowance received from the Board was in no way commensurate with the family needs. Fortunately, Mary Martha was just finishing high school at the time. She did not go on and take the normal course to prepare for teaching as she had intended, but instead went courageously into the "Dry Goods Emporium" of John G. Barnes, as his sole clerk and general assistant. Her modest wage was a great help, and outside her hours in the Emporium, Mary Martha managed, after a fashion, to run the house.

In recent years she was assisted in an amiable but somewhat unreliable fashion by her sister Vivien, fifteen years old, now a sophomore in high school. At this time, Theodora was a sober, conscientious child of ten, most precocious, Mary Martha devoutly believed, for already she was a

more dependable assistant than the flightier Vivien.

Mary Martha had been thus christened by her doting parents in a fond hope that in her would develop a sweet commingling of the commendable virtues of both the sainted sisters of the Bible. And in their desire to forward this possibility to the limit of their abilities, they persisted in the daily use of both names during her baby years. Mary Martha was nearly seven when little Vivien burst into coherent speech, and the first word on her rosy lips was a demand for the presence of her sister,—an imperative repetition that would not be silenced until that sister came.

"Merry O! Merry O! Merry O!" ordered the tyrant baby. And the name was so applicable to Mary Martha, so alluring in sound, so easily spoken, that from thence forth, Mary Martha was cheerily known as Merry O!

"Twenty, fifteen and ten," Mary Martha said sometimes, with something like good-natured de-

rision. "It's a ridiculous way to raise a family, father! Of course, not blaming you at all, for I suppose you did as well as you could, but on general principles, it's no way to build up an establishment. And you didn't get started soon enough, either, if you ask me. There ought to be a time limit to such things. Why, you never really thought of handing down a posterity, until it was time for you to turn your thoughts to solemn things."

Although her father laughed at this, as he usually laughed at Mary Martha's opinions, he really felt in his heart the criticism was just enough, for he was nearly fifty when Mary Martha arrived in the parsonage home, and now, at a time when the three girls needed so much of material care and fathering, he was frail and feeble, well on his way toward seventy, "superannuated" from active service.

The crisis which precipitated Mary Martha's morning mission and disturbed her father's sleep came, fortunately, in the early springtime. The

son of Benjamin Hargood, who had kindly proffered the ramshackle cottage, was on the verge of marriage, and his father planned to rebuild the little house at the edge of town to make a home for the son and his bride. This was obviously no more than reasonable, although it left the McAllisters shelterless.

The additional blow to their domestic serenity came quickly on the heels of the first. As Mary Martha sat browsing in the Book Department of the Dry Goods Emporium, which was her especial delight and charge, her employer ventured almost timidly to address her on a serious subject.

"You know, Merry O, my girl Helen gets through at high school next week," he said tentatively.

Mary Martha knew this only too well. She had foreseen the catastrophe from the moment of her employment, three years previous.

"And I ain't really got work enough for two clerks," he went on apologetically. "Not but what

you're a fine help, and I hate to see you go, you understand."

There was not another position available in New Paris. It seemed that every one in the little village who had an opening for a "bright girl" had either a daughter, a niece, or a cousin by marriage, to fill that opening. Mary Martha was inclined to think it was one of the laws of New Paris that no man should have any kind of work for a girl, unless he had a girl of exactly the necessary requirements in his family proper.

The only thing left for Mary Martha was an occasional bit of nursing or housework attendant upon the visits of the community stork,—a hard as well as an uncertain livelihood on which to depend for food for four.

It was in this emergency, as Mary Martha proudly boasted, that she resorted to the principles of New Thought as she understood them. Mary Martha was not much of a student, merely an indiscriminate devourer of things literary. It had been at her especial and fervent plea that

J. G. Barnes installed two scant shelves of books in a corner of his Emporium. Mary Martha herself had selected the books, selected them most painstakingly with the help of many publishers' advertisements and catalogues, to say nothing of three enthusiastic traveling salesmen who "carried books." In the end, it was a small but varied selection, including half a dozen of the latest and most widely puffed books of fiction, two or three volumes of standard poetry, including *India's Love Lyrics,* which Mary Martha afterward insisted was a mistake and kept carefully out of sight on the back of the shelf; *Science and Health,* which she thought was a doctor book when she ordered it; two volumes on the latest methods of practical Auto-Suggestion; *The Key to Theosophy; Troward's Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science;* three books on different phases of New Thought, as applied to physical healing, success in business and happiness in general; also *First Studies in Psycho-Analysis,* and *Faith, the Greatest Power in the World,* by McComb.

This comprised Mary Martha's Book Department of the Dry Goods Emporium, and in it she reveled. She read each volume again and again, and yet again. And when, as happened rarely, a customer came for books, Mary Martha took it grievously to heart, and selfishly, as she admitted, assisted her customer to the purchase of the book for which she herself cared least. Hence, the end of the Book Department was the self-culture, the personal erudition, of Mary Martha McAllister. For Mary Martha knew every beloved volume by heart.

J. G. Barnes regarded the Department with contempt born of Emporium practicality. "This town don't take much to books, outside the free library," he said, and Mary Martha felt the implied criticism of her judgment.

"What'll you take for the whole Department?" she demanded, a suddenness of notion which she would certainly have attributed to New Thought had she been working for a demonstration at the time.

J. G. Barnes laughed.

"You'll turn out to be one of these here authors if you don't watch out," he said. "Two dollars takes the lot."

"Deduct it from my salary," she said grandly, and in that moment Mary Martha made a great decision. The family of McAllister leaving New Paris for—somewhere—should be a Traveling Book Department.

Since it was in the spring that young Hargood married and Vivien was graduated, the entire summer lay before the McAllisters for their venture. Vivien and Theodora were wild with childish eagerness, Mary Martha breathlessly alert with dreams and plans. It was their father who felt the pain of parting. In another town, he knew he would be only "old Mr. McAllister, superannuated." In New Paris, ranking next to the active shepherd of the flock, he was still the spiritual leader. The going out would cut him off at once from all participation in the things he

loved most in these quiet declining years. But he did not hesitate.

"Seems as if the Lord just decided we had to move," Mary Martha had said, and that settled it; he never tried to resist the irresistibility of that declaration.

Perhaps the most surprising revelation of all these surprising days came when Mary Martha rushed in from work one night and flung herself into a chair with the terse announcement:

"Well, I bought an automobile."

Like most of life's climactic moments, Mary Martha's was met in silence.

She looked about, almost defiantly, at the awed and rigid group. "Why not?" she demanded. "Train fare is too expensive when you multiply it by four—since Teddy got so big nobody'd ever believe she was under ten, even if father would keep still long enought to— Well, anyhow, we can't walk, can we? We might get a rickety horse and a rackety wagon, but that's not stylish. And if we've got to do anything, I

say do it right. As father says, we've got to the end of New Paris and have to move! But we can't move on foot."

"Did I say that?" asked her father modestly.

"Where is it?" demanded Teddy, who, at normal, was always practical, and after the first staggering shock of revelation quickly reverted to type.

"It's down the road in front of Wrays'. We'll have to go down there after supper and push it home."

"Push it!"

"I thought it—"

"Well, so it is. But in the first place, I haven't learned to drive it, and in the second place there's no gas in it, and in the third place—it's smashed—a little bit. It belonged to Billy Graves and he ran into a truck—and he said 'There she lies, take it for a hundred.' You can always get a hundred for a Ford, even if there's nothing left but the name on the radiator. Everybody knows that. So I said, 'Done.' "

"Where'd you get a hundred dollars?" demanded Teddy, holding her rôle as interrogator, while the others continued electrified but speechless.

"I haven't got it. I told Billy to come down after supper and we'd give him a hundred dollars' worth of whatever we've got that he'll have. Goodness knows we can't move all this pile of stuff along with us, everywhere we go. Now there must be two dozen hens left, I should say. Teddy, you hurry up and finish your supper and go out and see how many you can catch. He's a farmer, he'll love hens. And the two pigs Smith gave us—"

"Those are good pigs, Mary Martha," protested her father suddenly. "They're—"

"That's what I told him. Now, father, be reasonable. You don't expect to carry those two pigs along in our Traveling Book Department, do you? And the piano—Vivien, you hurry and polish it up a little. As I told him, it's not new, but it'll play all right. And for goodness' sake,

father, don't mention that we only paid fifty dollars for it when we bought it at the auction. Pianos are higher since the war. Maybe you'd better go up-town somewhere, and let me do the selling. I think the hens and pigs and the piano ought to make it."

When Teddy had corralled as many of the hens as she could locate, and Vivien had obediently polished the piano, the united McAllisters walked briskly down the road toward Wrays', to convey home their new possession. At first sight, it was not prepossessing. Mary Martha's statement that it was "smashed—a little bit," did not begin to do justice to its condition.

Vivien turned a haughty nose in the air and announced that she'd rather travel on foot. The Reverend Mr. McAllister shook it from side to side, listened intently to the varied assortment of noises produced by every touch, tried the springs a time or two, and then looked doubtfully at Mary Martha.

"Maybe the blacksmith can wire it together,"

he said dubiously. "I can't risk a fall, at my age, you know."

But Teddy accepted it with the joyous hopefulness of youth. "We don't care, do we, Merry O?" she cried. "I bet it'll go all the faster 'cause it's hung together kind of loose!"

CHAPTER II

COMMONLY KNOWN AS COMMON SENSE

MARY MARTHA'S newly acquired motor stood dejectedly in the ditch at the side of the road and refused to budge. A leaking radiator, two flat tires, a smashed fender, a broken windshield, a door hanging loose on one weak hinge, detracted nothing from its spartan resolution to adhere to that one spot on the highway. The united efforts of Mary Martha, her father, Teddy and three small boys, failed to affect that high resolve, and the wheels but settled themselves more solidly at every attempt to dislodge them. Vivien scornfully declined to lend a hand in any such silly business, but took up a superior position some feet away beside the fence, where she tried to see all that was going on as a rank outsider, not even remotely recognizing the rest of the party.

"You can—do anything—if you do it—hard enough," panted Mary Martha, throwing every ounce of her strength into the unequal contest, both feet planted squarely in the rich black Iowa mud. "A Ford's—not so much—to move! Push, boys, push!"

Her allies rallied to another effort, but all in vain. The car did not so much as tremble in its tracks.

Then another Ford, complacent in new and shining pride, rolled quickly alongside and stopped.

"It's true then," called a bitter voice from behind the wheel of the new arrival. "Like a fool, I refused to believe it. But knowing you, Merry O, I should have known right off that the bigger fool nonsense it looked like, the bigger chance there was of its being so!"

Mary Martha dejectedly shoved the damp curls from her forehead, and tried to glower the peevish newcomer into silence, but he would not be abashed.

"I wouldn't believe it," he went on doggedly. "I said, 'No, her father may be a fool, but not that big a fool.' I said, 'Those girls may be out of their heads, but not that far out.' I said—"

"I don't care what you said!" cried Mary Martha at last, goaded into fury by the combination of her failure and his scorn. "Whatever you said, you can say it to yourself, or with flowers. Don't speak to me!"

Then he laughed, and swung out over the side of his car to consider the depths of the dilemma into which Mary Martha had wilfully thrown herself.

Mary Martha relented in a moment.

"Oh, Jeremy," she pleaded. "How on earth do you make a Ford go when it won't go?"

Jeremy Lanton said nothing until he had thoroughly inspected the car. Then he whistled. Then he was ready to express his opinion.

"You may get a lot of good out of all that slush you're always reading," he said loftily, "but there's such a thing as Common Sense, too,

Merry O, and now and again folks do pretty well to use it."

"I know all about it," put in Mary Martha. "It's the same thing as Mental Science. You read *Troward's Lecture* about it, and you will see."

"Common sense is common sense. That's all the name it's got and all it needs," he insisted grimly.

Mary Martha dug a resentful toe in the ground and said nothing. She knew very well that Jeremy Lanton would quickly start that car for her, if she but held her peace and looked miserable, which required no great effort, either.

"Common sense's not one of those pretty affairs that gets itself put into books, like some other things I could mention, but it's an awful handy thing in a pinch, Merry O."

Merry O swallowed even this thrust in humbled silence.

"There's two ways to push a Ford," Jeremy went on in a pleasanter tone now that she was

sufficiently crushed. "One is to let off the brake, and the other is to leave it out of gear in the first place, and you didn't do either one."

Vivien, from the walk beside the fence broke into mocking laughter, and even the small boys hooted derisively at Mary Martha's discomfiture, as Jeremy released the brakes. Then he took a stout rope from his own tool box, and towed her purchase home without another word, while the McAllisters trudged somberly behind.

"You see it's a good enough car all right," Mary Martha said defensively. "I knew it all the time. The brakes and the gears work fine!"

When they reached the house, Jeremy drew Mary Martha persuasively around behind the car. "Merry O," he began, "you're just running yourself head-first into all kinds of grief. This is an awful silly thing you're planning on. You can't go off alone in a bum flivver with that old man and those two kids! Why don't you just stay at home and be sensible, and marry me as I asked

you, and we'll build them a house right on the farm with us so you can run both houses, and—Go on, Merry O! I feel—I want—I can't stand to let you go off like this!"

"Oh, Jeremy," she answered gently, warm fingers clasping his arm, "if it was only myself, honestly, I don't know but I would marry you that way, just to get myself off my own hands and on to somebody else's. But I can't. Why, I've got to put Vivien in shape to marry a rich man, for goodness knows she can't do a thing in the world but look pretty. And I have to get Teddy steamed up to do something very smart and clever when she is old enough,—and you know father!"

"But how about me, Merry O? And how about you?"

"Oh, Jeremy, you're awfully good. You'll not forget me, I know, but you'll like other girls when I am gone. You've got to be happy in the end, you know, because you're the happy kind. And me?" Mary Martha laughed a little, contentedly.

"I'll be all right. You see, Jeremy, you've got to have time to *want* things, and to *miss* things, and to fall in love, and for all the other wonderful luxury things like that, and I've never had a minute to spare!"

What could Jeremy do?

He assisted, as he was well fitted to do, in their mad preparations for taking to the road.

And Mary Martha rejoiced in his help, partly because everything he did was well done, partly because it was a great item in cutting down the expense of getting ready. In the week that followed, with the usual neighborly interest of the small-town folk, every man in New Paris who knew anything about a car, lent a dexterous hand in the reconstruction of Mary Martha's. Many who had never touched finger to a motor before, saw in this a rare opportunity to acquire experimental knowledge, but Jeremy Lanton kept a strict eye on the final product and saw to it that no friendly but ill-prompted zeal had a chance

to wreak further havoc on the already shattered Ford.

It was Jeremy who suggested a camping-bed in the car, and then carried out his own suggestion by cutting down the back of the front seat and putting it on hinges, so that at night it could be dropped in conjunction with the back seat to form a good and cozy bed for the girls. And he resurrected from some place on the farm a heavy camping hammock for Mr. McAllister to use instead of a cot, it being lighter to carry and better in service. In a hundred ways he helped them to cut down the load, explaining again and again that in a motor trip, and especially a motor trip in "an old heap of junk like theirs," they must travel light, if they would travel far. He made a dust-proof box for the running board in which to carry their supply of food, and the kerosene stove. And as a final offering—in deference to Vivien's wounded pride—he painted the car afresh.

"Of course, I suppose I could work out all

these sensible ideas myself by going into the silence and concentrating," Mary Martha said, and added gratefully: "But it does save lots of time for you just to think them up offhand that way, without effort, and then go right ahead and do them as fast as you can get them in mind. I wish you were going along, Jeremy. With my Divine Love and your Common Sense, we'd be rich in no time."

Mr. McAllister, professing himself hardly qualified at his age to sell *India's Love Lyrics,* or to discuss with customers the philosophical intricacies of Psycho-Analysis and Mental Science, made hasty arrangements to take orders for Bibles and to distribute various religious tracts of his own choosing; while Vivien, who frankly confessed she had no notion of bothering with any kind of books for anybody, but spurred to unwonted effort by the zealous enthusiasm of the entire household, acquired an assortment of beauty preparations and toilet waters, for which she was confident she would find a ready market,

recommended as they would be by her own luxuriant dark hair, her creamy skin, her brilliant shining eyes.

As only the barest necessities of camping could be carried in the car, they sold most of their household goods, receiving in return a sum so slight as to make of the transaction almost a charity. Yet considering that everything had been in constant service for thirty years and more, the girls could not be blamed for the feeling that they were lucky to get rid of it on any terms at all. The things they wished to keep were neatly packed away in boxes, and stored in the basement of the church until they should send for them later on.

Mary Martha, with Jeremy as tutor, had no difficulty in learning to drive the car and change tires, and soon professed herself quite an artist in her ability to "turn and tighten things and punch with the wrench and pound with the hammer when she goes dead."

So their plans went on apace, and because,

—without understanding that back of that unyielding law lay all the mysteries of life and death and the eternal beyond,—from their early youth they had known there was an infinite source of supply which could not fail the one who tapped that spring in faith, they were only hopeful, and not at all afraid of what might lie ahead.

"The trouble with us," said Mary Martha, looking up from her book one afternoon, "the trouble with us is that we have never expected enough! We've been satisfied with too little. There's been a good deal coming to us we didn't get, just because we didn't know it was ours and take it. Now from this on, we've all got to get together and *expect.* Expect the very best of everything in the world! And then of course we'll get it."

On the last night before their departure, just before they were ready to sleep, Mary Martha gathered her little flock about her and fixed them with a purposeful eye.

"Listen," she began. "We've got to have a

plan. That's the first rule. All the books say so. Now for myself, my plan for the present is just to sort of—well, scurry along and get a job of some sort as quickly as possible, and see what comes of it. Now, Vivien, what is your plan?—I don't mean selling the beauty things,—I mean, your great general plan for life."

Vivien, thus set upon, flushed and giggled and finally admitted that so far she had been satisfied to get along as best she could, and had really no definite line of action mapped out for herself.

Mary Martha was willing to assist. "As I've often told you, Vivien, you're obviously fitted for nothing on earth but a rich husband, so you'd better make up your mind to that." Then, quickly forestalling paternal objections, she went on, "Oh, of course, father, she'll have to fall in love with him, but there are plenty of rich young men that any girl could fall in love with if she had a chance. You see, Vivien, a rich husband is satisfied if he has a pretty wife with a good disposition. That's what you are, and that's *all* you

are. Now, you must take a string and tie twenty knots in it, and every night just before you go to sleep you must say, 'I've got a rich husband,' 'I've got a rich husband.' "

Vivien laughed, still flushing with confusion. "What's the string for? To hang on to him, once I get him?"

"Oh, no. It's Auto-Suggestion. The string with the twenty knots is to count by, so you won't have to get your mind off the general idea trying to keep track. You're supposed to say it twenty times, night and morning. It works like this. You must picture an image until it becomes a reality. It's the rule. 'I've got a rich husband.' Don't forget."

"I won't do it," declared Vivien. "It's a lie in the first place, and I'd look pretty wouldn't I, sitting up in bed saying 'I've got a rich husband' twenty times, when everybody knows I haven't."

"You haven't now, but if you keep saying it, it will impress itself on your Unconscious, and then your Unconscious will make it come true. It's

all down in the book, and it's very clever. I'll let you read the book if you like."

"I'll read what it says about getting a rich husband, but I won't say it on a string until I get him. You begin at the wrong end, Merry O. The Unconscious ought to get him first, and then I'll say it."

To avoid an argument, Mary Martha turned quickly to Teddy. "Now, Teddy, you're smart, and it's a good thing, for you're certainly no beauty. I'll fix a string for you, and you must say, 'I am a genius, I am success, I am power,' over and over, and that'll set your Unconscious to working and first thing you know you will be."

"My *what?*"

"Your Unconscious. Why didn't you pay attention when I was telling Vivien? It's Auto-Suggestion. Your *Conscious* tells your *Unconscious,* and if your *Unconscious* believes it, it goes to work and makes it come true."

"Why should my Unconscious believe it, when the rest of me knows it's not true at all?"

"You mustn't argue," said Mary Martha confusedly, wondering why those ideas which seemed so beautiful, so rational, so very inspirational as she read them in the books, became suddenly so ridiculous when couched in the girlish phrasing of her materialistic sisters. "Now we must all be very, very sure that this is right, that God wants us to go, that only good and happiness can come of it to every one of us,—and it will."

"Will our Unconscious make it?" asked Teddy.

"No, this is New Thought. Our desire, which is really prayer, sets up vibrations which attract the things we desire from the Infinite Source of Supply and —"

"Mercy, Merry O, begin again, I lost you."

"Well then, just remember that 'Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need.' "

"Does the Unconscious—"

"No, that's Christian Science.—Well, never mind, then. Just say the Lord's Prayer and go

to sleep. I am going to affirm a while before I go to bed."

So Mary Martha, a slender slip of a girl to be cast in so heroic a mold, sat in the window, staring out into the soft black stillness of the summer night, trying courageously to affirm for herself and her father and sisters, health, success and happiness, as she had learned it in the books. Breathlessly quiet was the night, and Mary Martha, gazing out, never knew when she drifted from "conscious affirmations" to the sweet romantic dreams that every girl is heir to.

CHAPTER III

A DOOR THAT OPENED AND CLOSED

VERY early in the morning of a serene and cloudless day late in June, Mary Martha triumphantly, breathlessly, with something almost like desperation in her enthusiasm, hurried her family into the well-packed Ford and set out to search for the end of the rainbow. Only Mr. McAllister felt anything of sadness at leaving the old home behind. The three girls were bubbling over with excitement. Ahead of them lay adventure, romance, mystery, joy. Behind them —just New Paris! But Mr. McAllister no longer thrilled at the prospect of romance. For him, happiness lay in the pleasant routine of habit, the daily mingling with old friends, the coming and going in accustomed places. So it was with something of a sigh that he settled down in the front seat beside Mary Martha, and

watched the passing of the old familiar landmarks, one after another, until all was strange and new.

Vivien flippantly tossed a kiss behind her. "There goes Bing Gaswell's farm," she cried. "That's the farthest we've been on this road, so good luck to it! It's the end of New Paris for the McAllisters. I suppose I can look for that rich husband any minute now, Merry O?"

"And I'm just eaten alive with genius," burbled Teddy. "I feel like writing poems and painting pictures, and inventing air-ships to carry us away all the faster. What other kinds of genius am I likely to catch, Merry O?"

Mary Martha laughed good naturedly at their banter. "I thought myself something would have happened long before this," she confessed gaily. "Here we've been on the road two hours and we haven't had a sign of an adventure."

But a faith like hers was not to be disappointed. Something happened, even as she said the words, something neither more serious nor less madden-

ing than a blow-out. Merry O stopped the car with a terrific clatter, adroitly swept a puff of chamois across her face, and got out, pushing her father before her.

"What do you think of that?" she demanded. "And that money-grabber who charged me three dollars for the thing said it was vulcanized to go three thousand miles."

With the tire changed, and on their way once more, there was a subtle difference in their attitude, more of relaxation, less of tension. They sank back in their seats with the general blasé attitude of the accustomed tourist. Hitherto they had been but experimenters on the highway of motordom, now they were deep in the running of things. The motor world was beneath their tires.

Vivien and Teddy in the rear burst into song, and Mary Martha smiled reassuringly at her father, ashamed of herself because she was not quite able to banish that little, cavernous yawning beneath her belt.

While their general idea of direction had been

to "head straight west," on the advice of experienced drivers, they went first due north to Melrose in order to connect with the paved motor road, as the dirt roads in Iowa are not at their best in June. At Melrose, to their delight, they found themselves turning west, and their spirits soared in that knowledge.

In spite of their distinct pronouncement in favor of the West, they had gratefully accepted a vast and varied assortment of motor maps and logs, friendly gifts from the men at the garage, from the clerks at the drug-store, and from every other person in New Paris and environs who had ever motor-toured in any direction, and saved his routings. Mary Martha took them all, and gladly. "For," as she said, "we're starting west, but when you go off on an inspiration trip like ours, you can't tell where you may end."

From Melrose, through Osceola, they proceeded without mishap. Near Creston, they stopped at a lovely spot beside the road to have their first camp dinner, for which they were more

than ready. But unused as they were to making preparations in the open and to repacking the apparently unlimited number of odd-shaped pans and kettles that had been used, they consumed more time than they had anticipated. Their friends had assured them that by driving steadily they ought, by all means, to make Council Bluffs that evening, and now it was well in the afternoon and they were barely half the distance.

Deciding, however, that the summer was before them, and with no compelling pressure from the Inner Monitor who was their guide, they went on very leisurely, quite willing to "baby the Ford," as Jeremy Lanton had strongly advised.

It was still quite early in the afternoon when they decided to pitch camp for the night in a pretty wooded valley near Villisca. And to get their establishment down to a solid, working basis without loss of time, it was agreed that Mr. McAllister and Vivien should make up the bed in the car and swing the hammock, while Mary

Martha, with Teddy to assist, prepared their meals.

And so they spent their first night in the great outdoors, and lay awake for hours, very still, listening to all the myriad whisperings and rustlings of the summer night.

Early the next morning they were on their way, reaching Council Bluffs a little after noon. In order to get an earlier start the following morning they crossed the river to Omaha at once. Here, they had been told, was a convenient and comfortable auto camp, to which they made their way slowly and laboriously, for neither Mary Martha nor the car she drove was used to city traffic.

It was there, in the public park at Omaha, that Opportunity first opened a door to Mary Martha.

Reaching the camp at an early hour, they prepared their beds, and unpacked the kitchen equipment in readiness for dinner later on. Then they took a walk, smiling with friendly interest at the

touring campers about them and being smiled on in return. Some one had dropped a newspaper on the grassy bank, and Teddy, catching sight of a "funny column," pounced upon it, and as the others would not stop then for her to read it, she carried it back to their own corner of the camp.

Vivien set to manicuring her nails, Mary Martha flung herself out in her father's hammock, staring up through the leafy branches that screened the white-flecked sky, and Teddy read the "funnies." When she finished the column, she threw it carelessly into the box of pans beside the car.

Two hours later, when Mary Martha reached for a pan in which to warm the evening beans, she found the paper.

"Teddy, throw this in the basket over by that tree," she called, prompted by the printed instructions to keep the park tidy. But as she was in the very motion of giving the paper to her sister, she saw three words on the back sheet.

"WANTED: A GIRL."

Mary Martha read it, read it again, then turned back to the front and saw from the heading that the paper was of that day's printing, and read it again. Then she folded it neatly and, bulky as it was, put it inside her blouse.

The advertisement which had so intrigued her announced briefly that "E. Hankins and Company" was in need of a young woman of good appearance and education, to do work of a literary nature, and for whose services said E. Hankins and Company would gladly pay a good salary.

"I knew something wonderful would happen to us as soon as we began to get west," said Mary Martha. And she smiled.

The next morning she left the family and the Ford cozily settled beneath the trees in the auto park, and with the aid of three street-cars and four policemen, finally found the desired number as given in the advertisement. Neither the neigh-

borhood surrounding, nor the building that housed, E. Hankins and Company was prepossessing in appearance, but Mary Martha comforted herself with the idea it was an old part of town, as yet untouched by modern enterprise.

Hurrying within, she was ushered at once into the presence of E. Hankins, who looked her over quite as thoroughly, Mary Martha thought, as though it were his intention to buy her outright, clothes and all. He asked about her family, and seemed pleased at the eminent respectability of ministerial antecedents. He asked about her father's general health, and again seemed pleased that he retained his early vigor, adding vaguely that maybe he could give him a nice little job as "recommender" after a time. As to Mary Martha's education and ability to write the King's English, as understood and spoken in Nebraska, he seemed abundantly satisfied. When he asked her address, Mary Martha faltered a moment.

"We're camping," she confessed. "We've been on a motor trip. We love it in the woods. But,

of course, if I accept a position we will locate permanently in town."

"Well, now I'll tell you what," said E. Hankins at last. "This is a particular job, and it's not all that can do it. The only way to find out, is to try it and see. We're patent-medicine makers, and if I do say it myself, we've turned out a product that will carry the world and cure it. We're just getting into shape to do big things, but we expect a swamping business in a couple of years."

"I—I don't know a thing about medicine," stammered Mary Martha.

"You don't have to. What we want is a good, blood-curdling writer to go through the doctor-book and write up the most distressing maladies in a way to make your hair stand on end, and then finish off by saying that nothing but *E. Hankins' Animal Vitæ* will cure it. We've made a list of the worst diseases that we're going after in particular, and we're going to get out little booklets advertising them. We'll send 'em all

over the world, telling people how maybe they've got 'em and don't know it, and how to be on the lookout for the first deadly symptom, and then, of course, come out strong on our *Animal Vitæ*. Think you can do it? We'll pay thirty dollars a week to any one who's right there, and can write up them diseases in a way to make a well man think he has 'em."

To say that Mary Martha was horrified is a mild expression of her state of mind. She shook her head from side to side and blinked rapidly. An unexpected blow in the face would have been less shattering to her girlish confidence. Mary Martha had trustfully submitted herself to the guidance of Divine Love, which could not lead astray. She had devoutly promised herself that always and wherever she was, she would disseminate pictures of health, prosperity and joy, as became a child of Infinite Goodness. If thoughts are things, as she had read and implicitly believed, Mary Martha had stoutly sworn that no creative power of hers should send out upon a

helpless world vibrations of sickness, sin and sorrow!

And Mary Martha, trusting to divine guidance, had been led straight to E. Hankins, his doctor-book and *Animal Vitæ!*

On one point all the books had agreed,—that having set forth with confidence and assurance, under the direction of this Infinite Monitor, one must not turn back, must neither flinch nor falter. Mary Martha could tell the very page and paragraph in every book where this admonition appeared. Often, it seems, a thing which to our earth-trained vision appears mean or paltry, may yet fill its niche in the divine plan. Hence no opportunity, however humble, may be refused.

Mary Martha swallowed heavily. Well, perhaps, somewhere in this opportunity, certainly far out of sight and buried beyond her faintest imagining, lay the means of promulgating the doctrine of health by faith. She didn't see it. She couldn't even think it. But, "Refuse no opportunity," the books said.

"I am sure I can do it," she said feebly. "I have a very blood-curdling style."

"That's good. You come in the morning at nine o'clock and I'll have everything ready for you. Most of our girls come at eight, but literary work like this is different, and we know you have to make some concessions to authors and treat 'em right."

It was two miles to the public auto park, but Mary Martha walked every step of the way, grimly, doggedly, unhappily. She was a broken creature. But though she suffered, she did not hesitate. She had certainly been led—by something—straight to E. Hankins. In all the chaos, that one thing was clear. She wondered, vaguely, if perhaps she might portray disease on the printed page, and then neutralize its effect by holding fast the image of perfect health. But that would hardly be fair to E. Hankins, who wished to sell his *Animal Vitæ* with her assistance.

In response to clamorous inquiries as to her

position, Mary Martha was unnaturally cold and uncommunicative.

"I got the position, certainly I did," she said briefly. "It's very good. . . . Nine o'clock. Thirty a week. . . . Well, yes, it's literary, I suppose. . . . Talk about something else."

And not another word could she be led to say on the subject. She went to bed immediately after she had her supper, and did not, as usual, precede sleep by a bit of devotional reading, by a few minutes of quiet meditation alone in the silence, by the series of deep breathing exercises with which she was accustomed to inhale strength and confidence, by her mumbled repetition with the twenty knots in a piece of string, nor even by her usual short sentence prayer beside the bed.

Instead, she retired, simply and without ceremony, to toss restlessly about in the small car until Vivien, in a high state of irritability, wrapped herself in a blanket and slept on the grass near the car. The next morning, Mary

Martha ate no breakfast, but after drinking two cups of coffee, very strong and without sugar, stalked grimly away to enter upon her new duties.

The others watched in silence until she was out of sight.

"The bark of Merry O has struck a snag," said Vivien, laughing.

"Maybe she lost her string," suggested Teddy.

"Poor Merry O," said her father sympathetically and with great tenderness. "She rides so high when her wings carry her, that she gets a bad drop when she falls."

A stern-faced Mary Martha it was who entered that morning into the service of E. Hankins and Company.

"Most of our girls work in a big room together, so they can watch one another," Mr. Hankins explained pleasantly. "But we thought we'd better give you a private office for literary work like yours."

Mary Martha thanked him, smiling wanly.

"You don't look any too up-to-snuff to-day,"

he said with rough sympathy. "Your eyes are peaked, and you've not got any color at all. You wait. I'll fetch you a bottle of our *Animal Vitæ*. It'll fix you up in no time."

"Oh, no, thanks, I—"

"We're not going to charge you for it, you understand. Compliments of the house. Say, speaking of your father, how old is he? Pretty likely old chap for his years, you say?"

"Yes, just fine. He is sixty-seven, but he is never sick."

"That's good. Tell you what. You get him to take a couple bottles of our *Animal Vitæ* and then write us up a strong recommend, mentioning him being a preacher, and superannuated and all, and we'll give him fifty dollars."

She shook her head, smiling a little. "I don't think—"

"We'll furnish the *Vitæ*. Won't cost him a cent. There's some, of course, will take it on without bothering to drink the *Vitæ*,—but being a preacher—"

"I am afraid father would not—"

"Make it a hundred, miss. And it's easy money. It's not as if it wasn't good stuff. It is. I don't care what he's got, or even if he ain't got a thing in the world, our *Animal Vitæ'll* make him better. You ask him."

"I'll ask him," she compromised, at last.

"Now, we got three humdingers for you to start on. Consumption, Bright's Disease and Cancer. Three, good, stiff, knock-'em-out diseases, that'll scare the living daylights out of any mortal. You begin, as I said, on the first faint symptoms when they don't know what they've got, or haven't got anything, like as not, and lead 'em right up to the last ravages. And when you get these done, we're going to get up a set of children's books, with pretty pictures, and poems, and stories on one page, and then the gnawings of disease with pictures of it eating 'em to skin and bone on the other side."

When he had gone, Mary Martha took off her hat and gloves and sat down by the table, pulling

the huge *materia medica* toward her, distastefully but not without curiosity, and reached for a pad of paper. Consumption, Bright's Disease and Cancer, three good knock-'em-out diseases, as he said! Poor Mary Martha! Hers was a vividly living imagination, and quickly her bright pictures of serene good health and happiness went glimmering.

She had read that when the will and the imagination engage in a contest, will always gives way before imagination. But she did not think of that.

She bent over the book, and began to study the pages. By noon, she was really absorbed in her work, and did not take time to go for luncheon. In a way, she was thrilled with her own ability to absorb an impression and to make it real. She could almost feel the premonitory symptoms of the diseases she portrayed. It was positively illuminating to her that one could so bury one's self in a picture as to make it so nearly real. She decided she must exert every

ounce of her will power to throw off the impressions she was imbibing, or they might become real in fact,—since thoughts are things.

"In a contest between the will and the imagination—" But Mary Martha was too busy to think of Auto-Suggestion just then.

By evening she was exhausted, her face was flushed, her temples were throbbing. She had worked very hard, indeed. She hurried home, ravenously hungry, and was able to discourse of the day's work with some degree of interest.

But she did not sleep well, and awoke in the morning with a dull head, and a weary ache in her shoulders. She cleared her throat frequently when she was talking, and wondered if, perhaps, she was getting asthma from the Nebraska climate. Her father's eyes were anxious as he watched her set off to her work again.

"I don't like this," he said. "Not a bit! Merry O mustn't lose track of what she's only beginning to find."

At eleven o'clock that morning, when E.

Hankins dropped into her private office to see how she was getting along with the three most deadly diseases, Mary Martha was feverish, and the pain in her shoulders was severe.

She looked at him pitifully. "I don't feel so very good," she acknowledged sorrowfully.

"You need some of my *Animal Vitæ,*" he urged heartily. "You're anemic. You're all run down. Do you cough mornings?"

She shook her head, and then as he took the paper to see what progress she had made, Mary Martha leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes wearily. She admitted to herself that she was feeling most wretchedly, she was certainly getting something, she must be getting something or she would not feel as she did. And then, suddenly she realized that E. Hankins was reading aloud—reading what she had written—a dire and dreadful warning to the young, to the strong, the eager, the buoyant, the ambitious, to beware, beware of the first little ache, the first little pain, the first premonition of a fearful impending dis-

aster! Mary Martha listened, more and more horrified, as he nodded his head in approval of each more startling adjective, following Mary Martha's thought from the first vague little symptom,—petted into development, nursed into steady growth, magnified into mountain height,—into final Disease with clutching, icy fingers!

Something snapped suddenly. Mary Martha cried out.

"Oh, don't," she cried. "It is dreadful!"

Like a flash she caught the paper from his hand and tore it into shreds, laughing through her nervous tears. E. Hankins backed quickly away from her.

"You're out of your head," he said thickly. "You need a doctor, and a nurse, and a bottle of *Animal Vitæ.*"

"Oh, no, I don't," she assured him, shaking away the tears. "I just need to get a firm hold on my images of health."

"You—you're fired," he told her, backing farther away.

"I resigned long ago," she declared. "When you were reading the first paragraph."

"I'll give you a couple of bottles of *Vitæ,*" he said kindly. "No charge, you understand. That'll fix you up."

"I don't need *Vitæ.* I want— Have you a little piece of string about you?"

"String! String! You can't hang yourself, miss, it's against the law."

Mary Martha rubbed a slender hand across her throbbing temples, and said in a crooning, gentle whisper, "*Ça passe, ça passe, ça passe*— Tell me when I get to twenty, will you?"

But Mr. E. Hankins had rushed from the room in search of a doctor and a bottle of *Animal Vitæ.* So Merry O took her hat and gloves and walked quickly out of the office and down the street toward the auto park, whispering happily beneath her breath:

"Day by day, in every way, m-m-m-m-m-m-m-better and better."

CHAPTER IV

A REWARD OF VIRTUE

AT THREE o'clock, Mary Martha ran into camp and began hurriedly tucking dishes and pans into the box on the running board, but to the clamorous inquiries of the others she only said:

"We must start. I'm surprised you weren't all packed up long ago." And she did not contribute anything further to appease their curiosity until they were settled in the car and turning toward Lincoln on the O. L. D.

Then she smiled. "My headache's lots better, thanks," she said comfortably. "It wasn't Opportunity after all. It was a sort of Test, to try me out, and I must admit I came off a pretty poor second best.—Isn't it thrilling to be 'way out here in Nebraska?"

So they continued toward the West, cooking their meals by the roadside, camping at night in public auto parks or in shady groves, and buying fresh supplies from the farmers and at village stores. It was all very wonderful to them, very beautiful, and in spite of their economy, very expensive for their slender means.

As a traveling troupe of salesmen, business was not good. Those to whom Mary Martha hopefully submitted her Book Department, were either frankly outspoken in their disapproval of "such books," or had read them long ago from their village libraries.

Mr. McAllister met with no greater success. "We've *got* a Bible," he was told, again and again, with something like pained resentment, as if he had mistaken them for heathen, or as if any one would want two Bibles.

But Vivien had great good luck in her venture, —so great that Mary Martha was moved to suspicion, and at last announced her intention of going with her sister when she visited the next

farm-house with her beauty wares. Her suspicions were justified a hundred-fold.

Vivien would not lie, but she was full to overflowing with the guile that is deceit. In proffering her cold cream, her hair tonic, her lotion for the hands and arms, she had but to bring to attention those features of her own, and the sale was made for her.

"I can recommend it myself, I assure you," said Vivien in her limpid tones.

And the flushed, perspiring, sunburned woman of the Nebraska farm, looking at Vivien, looking at her beauty products, was set at once to dreaming dreams, and seeing visions of herself with just such skin, such hair, such hands as Vivien's. And a little later, Vivien tripped away from the door in triumph.

"That's all very well," said Mary Martha sternly. "We need the money, I admit. And it is true you didn't exactly say anything, but it was plain enough what the woman thought. It says in the books that prosperity founded on pre-

tense—faking, you know,—is not true prosperity, and will not endure. You read the book on *Success, and How to Attain It,* and you'll see. The first rule is, play fair. So if you're going to make folks think you use that crazy stuff, you have to use it."

Vivien protested, almost with tears, fearing her loveliness, in which she took such pride, might suffer from the treatment. But Mary Martha was firm. They were after prosperity with the solid ring, and this, according to her books, and even according to Common Sense, as expounded by Jeremy Lanton, to say nothing of their father's strict Methodism, could only be acquired by a strict adherence to the basic principles of honor and integrity.

And that evening, and every evening thereafter, before Mary Martha settled herself to the nightly rites of meditation, concentration, twenty knots and prayer, she put Vivien through her course of beauty culture.

Vivien acknowledged afterward that it helped

business. "May I just show you my complexion cream? I use it myself every night," she would venture softly. And there is yet to live the woman, noting that exquisitely pink and creamy skin, who could resist the cream it recommended. A lotion for the hands required no word of praise, for Vivien's mild statement, "I use it every night," was the beginning and end of the transaction. And even Vivien took a sort of heroic satisfaction in the fact that it was so strictly honorable a method, for when she said she used it every night, thanks to Mary Martha's zeal, she did use it.

But while the beauty business thrived apace, only Mary Martha reaped the benefits of her Traveling Book Department, for she studied every day, and practised everything she read with unabated confidence. But *The Sheik* and *India's Love Lyrics* she kept in the very bottom of the tool chest under the oil-can, to forestall any prying curiosity on the part of giddy Vivien or impressionable Teddy.

It was at a farm-house near Minden, where they stopped for water, all trooping out to the well together, that the woman, looking with great interest at the three laughing rosy girls, said timidly:

"I suppose you wouldn't— Maybe you wouldn't even think of it— We need some girls to pick cherries very much, and we can't get any one, and—we'll pay very well." Her voice and manner indicated the reticence she felt in making such an offer, as well as the greatness of her need.

To her surprise Mary Martha answered heartily. "We'd love to. We've never done that yet, and it will be good fun as well as experience, and then, we need the money." Mary Martha was never forgetful of those dwindling finances, and was always mindful, too, that in any venture led by Divine Love one must follow the guidance.

So they set up camp in a shady valley beside a running creek near the farm, and the girls picked cherries for a week, their father also lend-

ing a hand now and then. And from the house, the kindly and grateful woman sent them fruit and eggs and milk, and they felt that prosperity was beginning, even though faintly, to smile upon them.

A week later they started on, westward again, with a heaping hamper from the farmer's cellar in addition to nineteen dollars in cash. Mary Martha felt greatly encouraged.

"It'll be just one thing after another," she said aloud, but more to herself than to the others. "One thing after another until the Big and Beautiful!"

"I hope the next thing is nothing to pick," said Vivien. "I won't be able to sell any lotion until I cure those scratches on my arms. You're awfully slow with my rich husband, Merry O. Can't you demonstrate him a little faster?"

After driving steadily for several hours, they stopped under a thick clustering shade beside the creek, for their luncheon, and afterward the girls took off their shoes and stockings and waded in

the clear water, while their father slept peacefully on the roll of blankets under the trees. Presently, wading up-stream, came three children, with buckets of blackberries they had picked a little farther down the wood. With the usual clubbiness of parsonage folk, the girls entered at once into conversation with them, and when the details of their romantic adventure into the wonder westland were revealed, the oldest of the three looked covetously up to the grimy Ford beneath the trees.

"Say," she volunteered suddenly. "If you start right now, and go fast, I'll go along with you. I'm plumb disgusted, and I was just figuring on eloping anyhow, and I'd rather go with a gang than go alone."

Mary Martha promptly disclaimed her willingness to assist in such elopement. "You ought to be ashamed to think of running away," she said, in her most ministerial tone.

"You're running away, whole kit and kaboodle of you," came back defiantly.

"We're not running away from one another. We're just running away from a town where we couldn't make a living. But you've got a nice home, and loving parents, and friends—"

"Oh, shucks! What do they make me go to school in summer for? I've been getting education now ever since I can remember, and come summer-time I need a rest."

Pressed for an explanation of the exact state of affairs, it developed that the school bus which served their neighborhood to collect students for the high school ten miles away, was not required to make the trip for less than twenty students. They had but nine to offer for the coming year. A poll of the neighborhood showed that by conducting a summer school, with able coaching, and perhaps a little generous overlooking at the end, there were a dozen others who could make the high-school grade by fall. In their zeal for the education of their youth, these rich and sturdily persistent farmers did not hesitate. A summer school was the answer, and Deacon Wesley

Brady, the very next day following, was going to town to procure a teacher for the high-school aspirants—in absolute opposition, however, to the desires of said aspirants.

Mary Martha leaped from the water, and grabbed her shoes. "He needn't go," she cried joyously. "He's got a teacher. I came on purpose. I knew it all the time. I know more about high school than—the high school knows."

The children stared at her soberly, unconvinced. "You're too young," said the oldest of the trio finally. "We never have teachers that wade in the creek and have curls and wear short skirts. Deacon Wesley Brady will never hire you."

"I don't wade very often," Mary Martha assured her. "You—you needn't mention it to any one. We were very hot and dusty from the long drive, and cleanliness is next to—a high-school education. And my hair isn't as curly as this except when I'm very hot. And I was going to lengthen my skirts anyhow."

Vivien was drawn forcibly from the water to assist in Mary Martha's preparations for an attack upon the deacon, and after the children had given directions for finding him, the two girls flew up the bank to the camp. While Vivien let out the hem of Mary Martha's best skirt, Mary Martha herself brushed the lovely, unscholarly curls rigidly back from her brow and fastened the golden heap in a sternly uncompromising knot at the back of her head.

Then she quickly slipped on a plain white blouse, with ornamental buttons to the neck, which she usually turned down in a jaunty fashion on both sides, leaving her throat bare. But for this occasion, she buttoned it in military fashion clear to her chin, and further emphasized the martial note by tying a narrow black ribbon in a tailored bow in front. With something of a sigh, she cut the perky bow of scarlet ribbon from her hat and taking a pair of large owl-eyed amber-tinted glasses from the pocket of the car, put them on without a waver. With her skirt

now just missing the ground she felt she looked far more pedagogical than any mere deacon had reason to require, and was strengthened in this belief by Vivien's peals of derisive laughter, as she told her she "looked a fright."

The Ford had developed an alarming wheeze during the last few hours of driving, so Mary Martha set out in the deep dust and the hot sunshine to walk the two miles to the deacon's house. Streaked with dust and perspiration and attired as she was, there was in her nothing apparent of cheery Merry O, but she stopped behind a great lilac bush before she entered the house, wiped away the dust, and smoothed back the truant curls yet more severely.

The deacon was at home, and very ready to talk business, seeming indeed relieved at anything that would save him a trip to town. He asked a few aimless questions, which she answered readily. Naturally, the morals of a daughter of a Methodist minister, even superannuated, were quite above reproach.

"No, I have not really taught school," she confessed reluctantly, when pinned to a decisive answer, wondering if perhaps there might not be something she had overlooked in one of the books, to justify a mild prevarication in a case of need so dire. "But I was always a great student, and I am a high-school graduate myself, and have done quite a little tutoring in high-school work."

This was strictly true, for Vivien, who was notoriously indifferent to study of any sort, would never have reached the second year except for Mary Martha's persistent coaching.

"And then for three years," she continued, "I had entire charge of the Book and Study Department of the J. G. Barnes Emporium in New Paris, Iowa."

"And you think you'll know just what to give 'em to fix 'em up tip-top for high school in the fall?"

"Oh, absolutely. I did that very work, with great success, just two years ago."

And so she did, for Vivien had failed to pass out of the eighth grade according to schedule, and Mary Martha, in consequence, gave her a grievous summer with her books.

"Well, now, we figure on two months' school. There's twelve of us, and we count on payin' five dollars a piece a month. If you calculate you can put 'em in shape, and will do it for that figure, I don't see as there's any more to be said. We don't want no flighty-tighty youngster gaddin' around, but you seem like a woman of some judgment, and you look plain and homely enough, so I don't see but you'll do first-rate, and save me a trip into the bargain. The schoolhouse 'll be open Monday morning, and if your father, as you say, figures on livin' outdoors for a spell, why, there's no reason why you can't pitch a good camp near the school and have a nice time of it. We're a sociable neighborhood, and we have a good many parties, and ice-cream socials, and whatnots, and as the teacher, of course, you'll take a pretty prominent part in the goings-on."

Mary Martha could hardly believe her good fortune. Oh, Divine Love was wonderful! As soon as she turned her back upon a prosperity which came through the dissemination of false belief and error—Behold, the reward of virtue!

She held her feet to a steady walk as long as she was within sight of the deacon's windows, and then she ran a little, in very jubilance of spirit. Then she walked again, thinking deeply, very grateful in her warm young heart for this beautiful thing that had happened.

"Ride, lady?" A car whirled by in a cloud of dust, and the brakes ground noisily, as it slid some yards ahead before the driver could bring it to a stop.

"Yes, please," called Mary Martha. And, forgetting the weight of scholasticism, she made a flying leap after the car. Her hat fell off, but she caught it lightly in her hand, still running. The amber-tinted glasses tumbled in the dust by the roadside, but she did not notice. Springing lightly on the buoyant feet of twenty young and

happy years, Mary Martha swung gaily into the back seat of the car, laughing.

"Oh, thanks, awfully," she said.

The little curls were tumbled enticingly now about her flushed face, and her starry eyes shone exultingly, with no sheltering amber shade to hide the blue. Unmindful, and resenting the unaccustomed restraint at her throat, she pulled off the narrow black ribbon, and loosed the uppermost buttons,—Merry O, in truth again, happy, and fair to look upon!

The two men in the front seat, father and son, turned about and stared in astonishment at this sudden transformation from what had seemed a feeble, trudging, middle-aged woman, with dragging skirts and drooping head, to a laughing, light-hearted, light-footed, golden-crowned girl.

CHAPTER V

WHOM THE GODS LOVE

MARY MARTHA was too happy to keep still. "It's awfully good of you," she said with her chatty friendliness of manner, leaning over toward the front seat. "It's so hot and dusty,—though I should forget it if I could just settle down to think,—and I'm in such a hurry to get home and tell the good news." Mary Martha's voice was singing.

"You seem to be a stranger in these parts, miss." It was the father who spoke.

"Yes, we're motoring through from Iowa to—Oh,—somewhere! My father was a Methodist minister there, but he was superannuated, and so we decided to go back to nature a while. It's supposed to be very good for you."

"Just you and your father?"

"And two younger sisters. We want to locate

somewhere, to stay forever. We're just going to keep on until we find a place, and realize it is the best place in the world for us. That's New Thought."

"It sounds new."

"But right now we are going to camp here for two months, and I am going to teach the summer school for Deacon Brady."

"Teach school! You don't look like a school-teacher."

Mary Martha clapped her hand to her eyes. "Oh, mercy, I've lost those glasses. I look much more like a teacher when I have them on. Never mind, I'll get another pair," she added grandly, remembering the sixty dollars a month. "A wonderful thing has just happened to me," she went on, unable to resist the temptation to share her joy. "I had a position in Omaha, and I needed the money, too, most awfully, but I gave it up—because it was sending out the wrong kind of vibrations. Though really I don't deserve much credit for it, because I didn't give it up until I

was just ready to catch consumption and Bright's disease and cancer. But anyhow, I gave it up, and then Divine Love led us right here, and took me straight up to the deacon's house, and gave me the position as summer teacher at sixty dollars a month. That's Christian Science. It's God's law of adjustment. And it shows too that I am developing right along. Because as soon as you develop up to a certain point, you are bound to get just what is coming to you. That is Theosophy."

Both men nodded, vague as to her meaning, but generally agreeable. The young man, who was driving, stopped the car at a gate beside the road.

"I'll take the young lady on down to their camp, father," he said. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

His father did not move. "I'll go along, son. As a good Methodist, and seein's her father's a preacher, I think I'd better go along and give him the glad hand of welcome."

"I can send him up here to see you."

"It's more neighborly for me to go first."

"Oh, all right, just as you say, dad."

The father turned to Mary Martha. "Young lady, think you could use some butter and eggs, and maybe some garden truck?"

"Oh, I know we could," she cried joyously. "You're so good."

He got out at once and started toward the house.

"I said wait, Bud," he called back over his shoulder.

Bud turned about in his seat. "If you lost your glasses maybe you better sit over here where there's not so much wind," he suggested.

"Oh, I couldn't take your father's place," she protested.

"He likes the back seat better, anyhow, he likes the breeze."

Under those circumstances, Mary Martha consented to the exchange, and when the old man returned, with a well-filled basket, he peered at

them both sharply, his face wrinkled up in the sun.

"I made her come over here, on account of losing her glasses," his son explained. "And I said you liked the back seat better anyhow, don't you, dad?"

"I better like it, I mostly get it," he grumbled, not ill-naturedly, as he clambered in.

Mary Martha's return to camp, in a car that neither rattled nor wheezed, escorted by two stalwart Nebraskans, lugging a heavy, heavenly basket, met with the awed respect it merited. Mr. McAllister came to meet them, with the easy cordiality of his calling. Brother Gibbons, not to be outdone in courtesy, welcomed him into the neighborhood and invited him to pitch permanent camp in Mr. Gibbons' own pasture, where he could easily get fresh supplies from the farmhouse. In addition he offered to lend him a big tent for the summer, which would add to the comfort of their menage, although Brother Gibbons did not so word it.

Bud Gibbons, lifting the hood and looking into the wheezy Ford, knew instantly just what was the matter with it and how to remedy that matter. He spent fifteen minutes turning and screwing, and the wheeze was gone.

Mary Martha, as hostess, begged both men to remain for supper in camp, but the demands of the farm made it impossible for them to accept.

"There's a street fair going on in town tonight," Bud Gibbons said bashfully, but with determination. "It's good sport. Ferris-wheel, side-shows, dancing in the street and everything. If I come by after supper will you go?"

Mary Martha hesitated.

"All of you, I mean," he hastily added. "Lots of room in the car. Take the whole push."

"Oh, let's," pleaded Vivien.

"Me, too," clamored Teddy.

"Oh, father, will you—"

"You girls go," he said, with the guileless innocence of the good, grown old, "I'll sleep."

"Oh, but, father—" Mary Martha's voice was insistent.

"Lots of room for everybody," repeated Bud.

"Father, if you won't go—"

"Oh, all right, all right. We'll go, young man, and thanks."

They drove away, the Gibbons, father and son, Bud looking back to that bright spot under the trees, which was Mary Martha, her golden curls clustered about her shining face.

After all, although camping had its charms and thrills, it seemed rather good to the McAllisters to be city folks again, going the rounds of the bright streets, with their flags and their streamers of colored lights. Carefully conducted by Bud Gibbons they made the circuit of the two blocks again and again, hopefully and with much laughter tossing rings and racing ponies in the candy lottery, riding the Ferris-wheel and merry-go-round, and munching joyously on pop-corn, peanuts and candy.

Then from down the street sounded the first call of the band. "Come on, they're going to dance till midnight," urged Bud.

The corner at the farther end of the street had been squared off with ropes, and there, under a great canopy of many colored lights the young of the community, as well as many of their elders, grouped gaily for the street dance.

They watched the first in silence, standing all five close together. Then as Teddy and Vivien frankly preferred the more riotous section of the fair, their father volunteered to go back with them, arranging to return later on for Mary Martha and Bud. When they were alone, Bud moved companionably closer to Mary Martha.

"I reckon—I suppose—*he* wouldn't let you dance," said young Gibbons with shy dejection, his eyes upon her pretty chin, for as yet he lacked the courage to meet her deep blue eyes.

"Oh, yes, he lets me," was the surprising answer.

"Gosh, ain't he sensible!" came Bud's heart-

felt ejaculation. And then in a moment they were under the ropes, ecstatically swinging to the jazzy tilt of the country band.

For some time, Bud was speechless. Mary Martha's smiling face, framed in its golden circlet close against his shoulder, where by the slightest movement of his head his lips could not avoid touching it, deprived him of his speech and his breath. It was she who broke the silence when it became a little awkward.

"It's lots of fun." She smiled at him in a way that threw him entirely out of step. "Wouldn't it be terrible if we were the other kind of preacher who thinks it a wicked sin?"

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," he admitted. "I never saw a preacher before with such good judgment."

"Of course, father's been superannuated quite a long while, and I've noticed they're never quite so scrappy about things when they're superannuated. It sort of softens them."

The third dance was a one-step, a one-step

that went at the rate of a gallop,—a very fast gallop at that.

Alas for Merry O! Bud, driven quite reckless with the nearness and sweetness of her presence, flung timidity to the winds, and clasping her firmly in his arm, swung her the length of the square with glad abandon. Mary Martha clung desperately to Bud, her face flushed, her eyes shining, her scarlet lips parted with the desire to laugh, for which she quite lacked breath. And so, at the farthest side of the square, glancing up suddenly, she looked straight into the glowering, accusing eyes of Deacon Wesley Brady.

"Oh!" Mary Martha's faint gasp struck to the heart of Bud's excitement, and he stopped abruptly. He looked at her, and following the direction of her horrified gaze, met the furious eyes of the deacon.

"So that's the howdy-do," he said at once, not loudly but with incisive scorn. "I wouldn't 'a' believed it, but when everybody kept sayin', 'Who's the new little chicken with Bud Gibbons?' I

thought I'd just have a look. And I find it's that nice middle-aged respectable school-teacher o' mine gone on a rampage. You're fired, miss, minister's daughter or no minister's daughter."

Like a satisfied god who has wreaked his vengeance, he turned about haughtily and stalked away without a backward glance. Mary Martha dwindled into a dejected, huddled heap, clinging to Bud's arm.

"Dad'll talk to him, Merry O," he said bravely, in his dilemma using the pretty name he heard her sisters call her. "Don't feel bad about it. Dad'll talk to him."

But Mary Martha shook her head. "Let's find father and the girls," she said. "You're awfully good—but I feel," she smiled faintly, "I'm almost homesick for New Paris."

CHAPTER VI

RENDERING UNTO CÆSAR

THE next morning, with the first pale streaks of the dawn, Mary Martha was stirring about in the camp beneath the trees, pulling the blankets away from her sisters in her haste to finish the packing and be on her way. Mary Martha's one idea now was to get out of Nebraska at the earliest possible moment. Early as she was, however, even before they had finished their hasty breakfast, came Bud and his father to pay a call of condolence. Bud was inconsolable at the disaster he could but feel his infatuation had wrought, but Mary Martha, after meditation and slumber, took it philosophically. After all, in a way, it would have been rather an anti-climactic finish, to her romantic plans and dreams, to end the summer teaching a country school in the heart of Nebraska. As long as Fate held open

the door of Opportunity for her, she offered no opposition. But when it slammed unexpectedly, leaving Bud Gibbons on the other side, after the first abject moment of her humiliation, Mary Martha knew she was satisfied.

From practical experience with his own car, Bud was a clever mechanic, and vented his feelings in regard to his blasted romance and shattered hopes by attacking the recalcitrant Ford with speechless fury. So that when, a little later, the McAllisters took to the road again, it motored irreproachably.

They drove steadily all day, for the Nebraska air, to Mary Martha at least, had suffered a serious taint, and she was anxious to put it behind her. Late that afternoon, finding no more suitable place, they pitched a hurried camp in a grassy bank by the roadside, a few miles east of the Colorado line. And starting early the following morning, with eager spirits soaring high once more, they left Nebraska behind and entered Colorado, the key-state to the West. Nebraska,

even up to within an inch of the other side of the boundary, was commonplace and "middle," but this was getting to the heart of things at last. They sniffed the air with quickened, sensitive nostrils, and realized at once that the Colorado climate is not in any sense to be confounded or compared with lesser, lower climates.

"Cowboys!"

It was the first word spoken by a McAllister in Colorado,—a ringing, triumphant call from Teddy! Unfortunately, Mary Martha in her delight was driving fast, and they caught but a fleeting glimpse of those harbingers of mountain and desert. There were two of them, long, lank and brown, clad in khaki as they would be, wearing leather puttees, and low-set caps, as they sat inert and motionless on the rocks beside the road and smoked.

"Now, you drive more slowly, Merry O," cautioned Vivien, "I didn't see them, and I wouldn't have missed the first cowboy for anything in the world."

In celebration of having achieved the heights of Colorado, Mary Martha fairly outdid herself, when they stopped for dinner, in the preparation of a wonderful meal. She was calling them to the festive cloth,—no less festive because it was of the faded oil variety, spread upon the ground, when another car pulled up beside their own, and the driver, stopping his motor, swung quickly out and crossed toward them under the fragrant pines.

He inquired briefly as to the road they had come, and the distance they had traveled from the state line. Then he asked if they had seen another car camping farther along, explaining that he was trying to overtake a party of friends and was having considerable trouble with his motor.

Mr. McAllister answered his questions cordially, and assured him they had passed no campers at all that morning, certainly none within the border-line of Colorado.

"We didn't see anybody but some cowboys,"

put in Teddy suddenly. "Sitting on the rocks, and they had guns and everything."

Her father smiled deprecatingly at Teddy's outburst, but the stranger regarded her with friendly interest.

"Cowboys! Were they galloping over the plains?"

Teddy expanded at his interest. "No, they just sat on the rocks beside the state line, but they wore boots and army clothes and had guns on their belts."

The stranger smiled at the description and mopping his brow with something of weariness, he said, "Well, I suppose I'll have to walk to town. My car is completely done up, so I'll have to hoof it back for help."

Mr. McAllister made haste to proffer a parsonage welcome to the woods. "Why not have a camp dinner with us, and then let us take you into town? We can tow your car back if you like, and save you a big bill. And glad to oblige you, I'm sure."

The stranger's reluctance to accept this hospitality was born of nothing more than politeness, and in a moment he was seated with them on the ground, hearing the details of their adventure westward. Mr. Dillson, as he introduced himself, being a Methodist by birth and breeding, was soon "brothering" Mr. McAllister and being brothered in return, and as they ate, he studied his companion with quiet speculation, observing the minister's thin, smooth-shaven cheeks, then rubbing caressive fingers over his own close-cropped, graying beard and mustache.

"You're pretty wise to go smooth shaved, brother," he said at last. "I fancy you're a bit older yet than I, but my beard adds ten years to my age, and that slick chin of yours subtracts as much for you."

Mr. McAllister, laughing, acknowledged that to be his own opinion, whereupon Mr. Dillson announced his intention to sacrifice his tonsorial growth upon the altar of manly youth and beauty.

The others laughed skeptically at this, but he insisted that he was serious, and turning to Teddy said:

"Trot out your father's razor, sister, and you shall judge my beauty, before and after."

Teddy, enjoying such a whimsical notion, hastened to comply, Mary Martha brought a basin of hot water, and they all grouped about him as he performed the solemn rites. Afterward they were unanimous in declaring that he had shaved off ten years from his appearance.

"And what's more," said Mr. Dillson, laughing with them, "I'll bet if I had a little black tie like your father's, I'd make a better-looking preacher than he does."

Her curiosity stimulated by this sporting offer, Teddy rummaged in the bag until she found a tie, and danced about the stranger as he put it on. And when he smoothed out the rakish crush in his black hat, setting it with mild decorum on his brow, they warmly assured him that he was a Methodist minister from the tie up.

While Mr. McAllister helped the girls repack the luncheon equipment, Mr. Dillson worked patiently with his car, trying in vain to restore it to running order.

"May I use your tools, brother?" he called down to Mr. McAllister.

"Help yourself! Anything you want," rang back the hearty answer.

By the time the bags were in place he had his car roped firmly behind the little Ford, and taking his place at the wheel to guide it, asked Mary Martha to stop at the first garage, which was in the village a few miles farther on. When she reached the garage, and almost before she had brought the Ford to a standstill, Mr. Dillson, anxious to delay them as little as possible, was out of his car and in the garage to make arrangements for the necessary repairs. He came out a moment later with two mechanics, who released his smart little racer, while Mr. Dillson himself, having agreed to continue to the city with his newly-made friends, stepped quickly into the

rear seat between the two younger girls, and said:

"All right, let's go."

As Mary Martha started the car, the mechanic tipped his cap, and called:

"All right, Mr. McAllister, I'll wire you at New Paris."

But by this time the car was on its way.

"New Paris!" echoed the McAllisters, in surprise.

"Yes, I have to tour Nebraska and Iowa on business, and expect to make New Paris in a couple of weeks. He figured it would take about that long to fix me up, so I told him to wire me there."

Mr. McAllister turned around in his seat. "He said 'McAllister,' " he began slowly.

"I had to give him your name and license number as reference. A license number is identification, you know. I hope you do not mind. He got the names mixed, and called me McAllister, by mistake, instead of Dillson."

This was a reasonable explanation, and the Ford continued serenely toward the city.

For the first time, Mr. Dillson began to show some annoyance at the unexpected interruption of his plans. He looked often at his watch, fingering it nervously, and wore an air of abstraction which even the merry chatter of the girls did not penetrate.

"The train east makes the junction below here in ten minutes," he said suddenly. "It stops on flag. Instead of going on to the city with you, I think I'd better catch the train there and get headed east. I've wasted too much time already."

Mary Martha came to a stop at the crossroad as he indicated, and when he stepped out with his bag, he said hesitatingly:

"Mr. McAllister,—don't be offended, but—I want to make you a little gift. I can never repay your kindness, I know. But we business men too often forget to lend our support to the church and its ministers. I want you to take this."

He held out his hand with a little roll of bills,

a ten and three fives, crisp and new. The minister shook his head, but the other was hurriedly insistent.

"You've got to. To please me. You have done me far more good than you realize. Take it. It is in the name of the church you represent."

When it was presented in that light, Mr. McAllister felt he need refuse no longer, but took it gratefully. Dillson did not wait to hear his word of thanks, but swinging his hat gaily toward the girls, made off down the track.

"Now you see," chanted Mary Martha jubilantly. "Sometimes it is berries to pick, sometimes it's a basket of vegetables, or free work on the motor, and now it's twenty-five dollars! Divine Love always has met, and always will meet—"

"And if it's nothing else, it's a bottle of *Animal Vitæ* or a pair of amber-colored spectacles," teased Vivien, but Mary Martha joined heartily in their laughter.

They were coming now into the hill country, the real hill country that leads at last to the mountains in the cloudy heights, and they were thrilled a little, seeing always in the road ahead, the Future and what it might hold.

They drove very slowly because they wished to prolong the joy of it, because Mr. McAllister was inclined to develop nerves in high speed, and chiefly because of the need to "baby the car," which was their motor by-word.

It was very late in the afternoon, as they sought a place to make their camp for the night, that Teddy espied a tall, lean, sunburned man, properly clad in khaki, sitting on a fallen log beside the road.

Vivien flung herself impetuously to her sister's side of the car, and both girls leaned out over the door, gazing back at the cowboy with wide-eyed avid interest. The effect on the man was electric. He leaped from the log, and stared after them, one hand shielding his eyes.

"Girls, don't do that," cautioned Mary Martha.

"He thought you were trying to flirt with him. Cowboys are awfully susceptible."

"Wasn't he gorgeous?" whispered Vivien. "I wonder if he is rich."

She turned about in her seat to look back through the dusty window at the sacred spot he had favored with his presence. Then she gave a startled cry.

"Oh, look! He's on a motorcycle! He's coming after us!"

Mary Martha turned pale. She had seen movies of cowboys in action. She knew all about their breezy unconventionality. Doubtless he had marked the lovely youth of pretty Vivien, and how she had thrilled at the sight of him. Doubtless he was coming now to claim her as his lawful, cave-man bride. Doubtless—Mary Martha clenched her teeth together, and literally "stepped on the gas."

Vivien and Teddy, in the rear, shamelessly hung over the door to look back at him, not, it must be confessed, without a secret hope that

he would overtake them in their flight. And he did. The little aspiring Ford had no chance to escape the noisy fiend pursuing with relentless steadiness of purpose. Almost before she realized how madly she was racing, the motorcycle swept up beside her, and the khaki-clad rider authoritatively signaled her to stop. Mary Martha bit her scarlet lips and pressed harder upon the gas. At least, he must take them by force, she would never yield without a struggle. The man in khaki seemed amazed at her defiance, he yelled at her, sounding his siren, slowing his motor to keep pace with the car, which now seemed but to crawl.

Finally, above the clamor in her ears, his voice reached somehow to Mary Martha's inner consciousness.

"Stop, you fool! You're pinched!"

Mary Martha stopped the car. She looked back once, withering Vivien and Teddy with an awful glare, and then sank shivering behind the wheel.

"I wasn't speeding," she faltered. "You can't speed in this."

"Well, who said you were?" he demanded rudely, settling his machine and going back to look at her number.

"What's your name?" he asked sharply, of Mr. McAllister.

"McAllister, sir, the Reverend Mr. McAllister, of New Paris. I—"

"Good lord, do you admit it?" gasped the officer, in frank amazement.

Mary Martha and her father looked at each other with solemn eyes. Admit it! Why not?

"What's your number?" asked the officer again.

"Forty-seven thousand seven hundred seventy-nine," said Mr. McAllister pleasantly, hoping to conciliate this temperamental representative of the law.

The officer looked at his book, went to the back of the car and returned again, staring at the puzzled minister.

"Say, what's the idea? You give your right name, which you could deny if you wanted to, and then lie about your license number that anybody can read for themselves!"

Such preposterously unreasonable conduct annoyed him.

Another telegraphic flash between Mary Martha and her father.

"Forty-seven thousand seven hundred seventy-nine," she said softly. "You're right, father, stick to it."

"I suppose now you'd like to deny that you stole Judge Fulton's car and left it back there at Law's garage, wouldn't you? And that it's the judge's Colorado license you got on this boat here!"

No McAllister could rally to this. They sat mute, awed and cold.

"Oh, well, tell it to the judge. It's none of my business. I got you, and I claim the reward. Though I must say you're a slick one, shaving off your beard and making up for a preacher

with a Ford full of kids. Well, you're due for the lock-up."

And then came sudden and dire illumination! Brother Dillson, on the express train, rushing east!

"What—what am I wanted for—in particular?" Mr. McAllister inquired mildly.

"I suppose maybe you do get mixed up now and then between prayer-meetings and your other little jobs on the side. This time, it's just highway robbery and forgery, and a couple of assaults for good measure. But the men ain't dead yet, so after all you may not be a murderer."

"Listen, dear Mister Officer," began Mary Martha placatingly.

"You shut up," he shouted. "You're pinched, too,—the whole crowd's pinched."

The officer briskly hand-cuffed the unresisting minister, looking through the car for concealed weapons, and then told Mary Martha to proceed slowly toward the county jail, and if she took

her hands off the wheel he'd "pump her full of lead." Tears coursed silently down Mary Martha's pale cheeks, but she obeyed.

CHAPTER VII

DIVINELY DRIVEN

IT DID not add to the general dejection in the little car when Teddy leaned over the seat from behind and, weeping bitterly, whispered:

"Oh, Merry O, it's just because we laughed at you, and wouldn't do as you said.—H—Have you got—the string with t—twenty knots?"

Mary Martha shook her head, unable to control her voice, and Teddy sank back in her seat, counting on her fingers as she murmured, gulping over every word, "Day by day, in every way, I'm getting better and better," and then, on the third repetition, burst into noisy sobs and flung herself into Vivien's lap in despair.

Vivien, with the impervious pride of fifteen, cuddled Teddy in her arms and said bravely, "Well, they can't hang us, that's certain. It's just what we get for going out in search of wild

adventure. Goodness knows we found it. The next time, Merry O, you'd better go a little slower and not have the Infinite Supply crowd us too much all at once."

Mary Martha smiled then. "He was kind of nice, Mr. Dillson, though he was a highway robber. I'm sure it was very good of him to give father twenty-five dollars. That shows he was ashamed of himself, anyhow."

Unfortunately, the judge had gone to Denver, and in his absence the best that could be done for the McAllisters was to clap them as comfortably as might be into a room in jail. And there, ignominiously, they remained until the early morning, when officers, flocking up from Denver to take charge of the family of criminal offenders, quickly recognized the error that had been made in their detention.

They heard Mr. McAllister's story, corroborated by all the girls in turn, of their encounter with Brother Dillson, and for final verification, persuaded the entire family to drive back with

them to the scene of their encampment. If further proof were needed, it was supplied in plenty, even to finding shreds of the beard he had sacrificed to elude capture. It was plain that while tinkering with the machine, when the others were busily packing, he had exchanged the license numbers of the two cars, hoping thereby to cause additional confusion and give him further time to make good his escape. Teddy's innocent account of the "cowboys" at the border, instantly recognized by him as officers set to guard the motor road into Nebraska, had verified his suspicions in that direction. At the garage where he had left the car, the mechanics declared it was not Mr. McAllister who had left the stolen machine with them, and further explained how Dillson had given that name, claiming also the "three daughters" in the car, with whom he was on a summer tour of missionary work.

By his heartless but clever machinations, aided as he was by the guileless innocence of the McAllisters, "Brother Dillson" successfully made

his escape, and was never heard from again in Colorado.

Mary Martha grieved for him. "Crime," she said, referring to the book for verification, "is only misdirected good. That's New Thought. And, poor thing, if he is so dreadfully wicked this time, when he re-incarnates and comes to earth again, he'll have to start in the same place and go through the same grief over again.—That's Theosophy.—I'm sorry I didn't give him the book, it might have done him lots of good. It's very interesting, father, you'd better read it. I don't think they teach it in the Methodist Church, so you probably don't know much about it. And it's awfully deep, too; perhaps you wouldn't understand it anyhow. But I do wish Mr. Dillson had a copy of *The Key to Theosophy*. If he just had to keep at it until he works off every last bit of his own deviltry maybe he'd go a little slower. I'm afraid maybe I let myself in for some bad Karma because I didn't do anything for him."

After this experience, the McAllisters desired nothing so much as to get away as quickly and as far as possible from the scene of their humiliation. Colorado, but a little while ago so beautiful, now was hateful to them. They felt themselves to be regarded on every hand with black suspicion, and when people turned in the road to look curiously after the heavily loaded, dusty little Ford, as was not to be wondered at, they flushed with the guilty consciousness that they were the notorious McAllisters. On then, farther west, that the past might be forgotten.

They found the roads in northeastern Colorado well made, and extensively traveled, leading in a hundred ways to different parks, summer resorts and mountain camps. They took the steep grades slowly, stopping on the highest passes for the inspiration of the view that always came to them.

And thus, one day, they found themselves climbing, with the greatest difficulty it is true, a beautiful road near the Rocky Mountain Na-

tional Park, narrow, steep, and winding with the curves of a riotous mountain river. The little Ford puffed and wheezed and boiled at the terrific strain to which it was subjected, hissed and died. Again and again the girls carried cans of water from the river below to pour over the hood and into the radiator. Again and again they drew off patiently beside the road, and let the motor rest and cool, glad by this means to gain a few additional yards before once more "the baby" gasped and died.

Mary Martha turned wearily to her father. "Let's camp. I've pulled this thing up, baby, baggage and the whole family, right on my raw nervous system the last three hours. I'm a wreck. Let's camp."

A little later, after more heart-breaking effort, they came to a branching road which led off across the river by way of a rustic, wooden bridge, and disappeared beyond between high boulders of rock and a growth of pines.

"Let's cross the bridge," said Mary Martha.

The girls carried water to pour over the hood and into the radiator

"There's got to be something there, and we shall never find a place to camp on this narrow river road."

They left the highway and crossed the bridge, passing slowly up the narrow glen among the great rocks and the fragrant pines, coming out at last in a sheltered nook designed for nothing else than camping. To the right, higher up, they descried the outlines of an old abandoned cabin, and the girls ventured curiously up to investigate.

It was a weather-beaten shack of shingles, blackened by rains and wind and burned by the sun, built high on the rocky bluff above the river. The door on the lower side stood open, hanging loose on a broken hinge, and entering, they found it to be little more than a cave, with a rock bottom floor, and the walls on three sides formed of the solid rock of the mountains. There was a stairway leading up, and as the place was obviously deserted, they felt no hesitancy about ascending.

Above they found two rooms, roughly finished

but giving on every side to the river, to the pines and to the mountains. There was an old table in one room, and a cupboard roughly home-made, with several rickety chairs. And in the other room, they found two cots, but with neither blankets nor mattresses. It was all very still, very beautiful, standing there desolate, webby and tumbly beside the mountain river.

"We'll camp right here," decided Mary Martha quickly. "We'll run the car over out of sight among the rocks, and carry the things up. It hasn't been used for ages, and all the signs say this is a national forest reserve, so finders are certainly keepers."

With gay enthusiasm, in spite of their weariness, they put this brilliant plan at once into execution by carrying up blankets, kerosene stove and box of supplies. But when Mary Martha attempted to start the car, she found it powerless beneath her touch. The motor flared up, puffed feebly a time or two, and then weakly died.

Mary Martha prodded, pushed and turned, to no avail.

"I'll follow the road up to the nearest house," she said at last. "The road has to lead to some place. And if there's a house, there'll be a man, and almost any man knows how to persuade a Ford. You girls fix dinner while I'm gone, and I'll get eggs and things if I can. But first of all we must find a man to fix the 'baby.' "

Sadly, for she was very tired, but still gamely, Mary Martha trudged off up the road, hopeful of coming out upon a human habitation in spite of the fact that the trail she was on showed no evidence of recent usage. The road was like all others in the mountains, winding among high boulders, sometimes under heavy foliage, now directly over-top the noisy stream, now entirely beyond sight but within sound of its rushing, always turning, twisting and winding. And presently, quite without warning, Mary Martha, following it, stepped out from behind a steep rocky ledge into a bright clearing where a little

gray stone cottage stood high and sturdy on the ridge, a cottage built on solid rock, between clustering boulders, and made of the same gray rock that surrounded it.

Mary Martha cried out with delight, for it was by far the most lovely of all the lovely summer houses they had passed.

As she stood between the high cliffs, weary but warmly admiring, a man in shirt-sleeves, bareheaded, leaped down the stone steps three at a time.

"Run! Run!" he shouted.

Mary Martha looked about in voiceless terror. There was no ferocious mountain beast, no poisonous reptile within sight, but she trembled at thought of some unseen, unsuspected danger lurking near. The young man had not waited. He ran down the road with great strides, and caught her hand.

"Run!" he cried again, and dashed back once more to the gray cottage, dragging the terrified girl with him.

"Wait," she gasped, reaching instinctively for her flying curls.

"Hurry! You can't wait!" said the surprising young man, in a low intense voice. "Quick! I think he's dying."

Then they were within the door of the cottage, and the young man was pulling her after him up the stairs. On the upper landing he paused, and stood listening. There was a great silence all about them, and from without only a faint murmur of the wild little river dashing in its canyon bed.

"M—m—m—maybe he's d—d—dead," faltered Mary Martha, with chattering teeth.

"Sh! Listen!" He tiptoed softly down the hall and stopped again outside a door, listening intently.

Mary Martha followed close after, determined not to be left alone in this ghastly, gruesome place.

He turned the knob of the door. It did not open.

"He's not dead," he said, with obvious relief. "He locked the door after me."

He knocked softly, and then more loudly. There was no answer from within.

"Uncle Bob!" he called in a gentle voice. "Uncle Bob!"

"That you, Steve?" came faintly from behind the locked door.

"Yes. Throw me the key."

There was silence for a little.

"Folks back yet?" queried the voice again.

"Not yet. Throw me the key, Unc."

"Steve," the voice was very feeble, "I can't. I can't even see the transom. Come up the window."

"Wait here," Steve said to Mary Martha, and turning, ran quickly down the stairs.

"I won't," wailed Mary Martha. "Don't leave me," and trotted after him as fast as she could, considering the curious trembling in her knees. He ran through the cottage and out at the back, Mary Martha after him, but before she was fairly

outside, he was working his way straight up the steep rocky bank, clinging to jutting bits of stone and climbing vines.

"You can't come this way," he called down to her. "Go back. I'll unlock the door for you."

She stood below, watching anxiously until he safely reached the top, stepped quickly across the narrow intervening ledge of rock, and climbed over the sill of the window with great dexterity. Then she trailed dejectedly back into the strange stone cottage. He met her at the foot of the stairs and led her up once more.

As she entered the room at the end of the hall, she caught one glimpse of a thin gray face on the bed, a straggling gray beard, a pair of piercing gray eyes,—one glimpse, and the gray face slipped out of sight beneath the covers of the bed.

"Stop him! Catch him!" gasped Mary Martha.

The young man reassured her. "That's all right. He just doesn't like being looked at. He often slides under that way. It's quite all right."

As suddenly as it had vanished, the gray face rose again.

"Lock the door, Steve," whispered the old man hoarsely, moistening his thin gray lips, and would have disappeared again, but Mary Martha caught his shoulder.

"Wait," she begged. "What is the matter? What is it that you want me to do! How can I help you, if you stay beneath the covers?"

Arrested in his intention, he gazed at her stolidly and shook his head, the gray eyes almost defiant, as though it were none of his business what she did, and let her find out for herself what he needed.

Having locked the door from within, Steve came back to the bedside. "He's awfully sick," he explained. "He has terrible pains after his meals, and clutches at his heart, and goes white and blue. He had a fainting spell a few minutes ago when I came after you. He went limp and cold and—"

Mary Martha took the thin gray hand in hers and tried to count the pulse.

"Get a lemon and some soda. Hurry up." Mary Martha in action was always curt.

Steve was only too happy to carry out orders from any one in authority.

"Leave that door unlocked," she called, as he started away. "I don't want to stay locked in here with you two—"

"We're not mad, if that's what you mean," he called back to her from the stairway.

It was certainly what Mary Martha had meant, but she was glad that she had been spared the word.

She loosened the collar of his night-shirt, buttoned tightly at the old man's throat, and relieved the pressure of the blankets above him.

"Everything loose, that is the rule," she said briskly.

She took the lemon and soda from Steve. "Get a hot water bottle, real hot, two or three if you have them. His circulation's bad. Bring a bowl

or something—he's likely to be a little—er—sea-sick pretty soon."

While he was gone, Mary Martha squeezed the juice from the lemon into a glass and stirred in a generous portion of soda. By the time she had it ready, her patient was far below cover and snoring aloud, in a futile effort to efface himself from public attention.

"Pull him out," commanded Mary Martha, when Steve returned with the bottles.

But hearing the order, the old man desisted from the idle snoring and dragged himself up on his pillows. To her surprise, he drank the soda without an objecting word, and then, with the bottles at his feet, Mary Martha and Steve, on opposite sides of the bed, set to rubbing his wrists with brisk energy.

"You ought to keep hypodermic needles and things in the house with a heart like that," Mary Martha said, chattily. "Unless you are scientific enough to follow the deeper lines of Mental Science or New Thought, or something. And I

don't suppose you are. What's he been eating, anyhow?"

"Nothing in the world but raw eggs and milk for days and days," Steve complained, taking it as a personal affront that any one should suffer on a diet so modest. "It's all he eats, fresh milk and fresh eggs, but he's upset all the time. They say he won't last through the summer."

"No wonder he's upset. Who says that? Your doctor?"

"He won't have a doctor. The last one he had—I wasn't here, it was while I was in school, —he left two bottles for Unc, one of medicine for him to take, and the other alcohol to rub him with. You know they put something in the alcohol now so you can't use it for pleasure. And somebody gave Unc the alcohol to drink and rubbed him with the medicine, and he nearly died. He thinks they did it on purpose. He won't have a doctor any more."

Mary Martha looked across at Steve, and smiled a little to herself. He was good to look

upon. Tall, slender and brown, he was, with gray eyes something like those on the bed, kindly and worried, with muscular bare brown arms and strong thin hands. Mary Martha smiled again. Since Divine Love had chosen thus to draw her with physical force into the little stone cottage beside the river, it was at least interesting to remark that there was a Steve at hand.

The old man on the bed spoke suddenly, and his thin sharp voice increased the impression she had of him, which was altogether gray and gaunt.

"Who got you?"

"He got me." She nodded toward Steve.

"Where'd you get her?"

"Down the road."

The three of them looked on one another curiously.

"How'd you come in the road?"

"You're a nurse, aren't you?"

"Who sent you?"

The gray old man turned to his nephew. "Steve, ask her if she is alone. We can't have

any more flesh and blood relations around here. Ask if she is all by herself?"

Steve looked inquiringly at Mary Martha, who flushed a little. She answered promptly, but rather weakly.

"I—I am alone. Of course I am alone.—Oh, I have a family, you understand, but—but it is not right with me. You—you won't be bothered with my flesh and blood relations, I assure you." Mary Martha consoled herself that this was strictly true. While she was in the little stone cottage, and they were down the road in the brown shingled shack,—of course they were not with her. "I—I am quite by myself."

The old man nodded with relief. "That's good. Strangers are more satisfactory—any way you take it. Especially in an emergency. Seems to me I couldn't stand any more Flesh-and-Bloods —right now."

Steve took up the interrogation, as his uncle seemed to feel that everything necessary now was known and settled.

"Where did you come from?"

"I came from New Paris, Iowa," she announced brightly.

"New Paris, Iowa," he repeated vaguely. "I don't think I ever heard of it."

"No, I don't suppose you ever did. It's really not so much a place as a—a state of mind, you know," she explained.

"I knew at once you were a nurse," he said. "Which of them sent you up?"

Mary Martha lowered her long lashes reflectively, and then replied, with a great appearance of candor. "Nobody sent me. I am not a nurse —not really—a trained nurse, that is, but of course I know all about nursing in a practical, sensible way, especially along the lines of auto-suggestion and mental science and divine healing, I really specialize in those. I—I was just looking for a position—and—"

"You've got one," interrupted the old man, and then, abashed at his suddenness of decision, slid beneath the covers.

"He likes you," said Steve, smiling warmly at her. "We'll pay forty a week. That's what *they* said they'd have to pay, and room and board, of course."

Mary Martha clutched her golden head and tried to still the joyous tumult in her breast. "How—how long will it last?" she asked, in as professional a tone as she could muster.

"Until—until—" Steve hesitated.

"Until I die," announced the old man sharply, appearing again on the pillow. "And, Steve, you'd better pay her in advance before *they* get home with *theirs,*" he suggested. "In my pants pocket." Again he disappeared.

Steve went at once to the closet and from a trousers pocket drew forth a well-worn wallet. From this he counted out forty dollars in bills, and laid them in Mary Martha's itching palm. As he went back to return the wallet, Mary Martha bent ecstatically over the bed, on which only the thin outline of the old man's figure beneath the coverlet was visible.

"Oh, Mister Bob, your chances of making heaven are mighty slim right now, with Mary Martha drawing forty per," she whispered exultingly, and clasped her hand fearfully over her tell-tale lips as the sharp gray eyes rose suddenly above the line of the blanket, staring into her frightened blue ones above.

From below, there was a sound of a motor drawing noisily up the steep road toward the house.

"Lock the door, the door, Steve, quick," cried the old man in a voice of panic. "Here they come."

CHAPTER VIII

INTRODUCING KARMA

MARY MARTHA caught Steve's hand and clung to it, her knees sagging weakly, her teeth chattering, a bundle of nerves too tightly strung. She wondered desperately if this were really she, if these ridiculous things were truly happening, if that good-looking man at her side called "Steve" was more than a creature of her foolish fancy, and if that thin outline beneath the blanket could be a human being in solemn truth.

From the hallway came a sound of heavy tip-toeing footsteps, and hoarsely whispering voices.

"Wh—wh—what is it?" stammered Mary Martha.

"Sh," was the hissed warning from Steve.

There was a light knock on the door, but no answer from those within.

"What is it, oh, what is it?" pleaded Mary Martha.

"It's the Flesh-and-Bloods," came in sepulchral tones from beneath the blanket.

"It's Cousin Ben," explained Steve.

There was a louder knock, and then a low call.

"Steve, oh, Steve!"

The door-knob turned, in vain.

Steve creaked heavily across to the door, but did not open it. "Go away," he said. "Uncle Bob is worse. Don't disturb him."

"I got him a nurse," came hoarsely from without.

"Too late. He's already got a nurse. She's in charge, and she won't let any one in under any circumstances."

There was a confusion of whispers without, indicative of sudden consternation. Then again, "You can't do that. I got him a nurse myself. She's here. Open the door, and let her in."

"Sorry. Uncle Bob's already hired a nurse, and paid her in advance. If you keep your nurse

here, you have to keep her out of this room and pay her yourself."

Uncle Bob emerged from the blanket, and his gray eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "That'll fetch 'em, that's a knocker," he muttered.

And indeed it proved to be just that. "Let me in a minute," urged the voice. "I got an awful good nurse. Let him look at her anyhow. Maybe he'll like her better than the one he's got."

"It's too late. He's already hired this one."

"This is an outrage," suddenly stormed in a strong woman-voice. "I claim a full day's pay, and you've got to take me back to town in the auto."

The footsteps and the warmly argumentative voices receded, and a little later they heard the motor again, and Steve from the window reported that the first enemy was in retreat.

"That's just one of 'em, though," mourned Uncle Bob bitterly from beneath the blankets.

"Will you please explain— Will you kindly tell

me— Will you— What does this mean anyhow? What's going on here? What's the matter with him?" indicating the blanketed outline, which slowly heaved upward until the gray face appeared.

"Me? I'm dying. That's the only thing they agree on."

"That's an awfully silly thing to say," said Mary Martha. "Anybody that can shoot himself up and down under those heavy blankets the way you do, is certainly in no position to claim a pair of wings."

Uncle Bob, with a deprecating grin, slid sheepishly from sight, and Mary Martha turned to Steve.

The story, as he told it, was one of countless complications, but after many questions on her part, and detailed explanations on his, with a generous application of her always vivid imagination, the situation, as she came to understand it, was something like this.

Steve himself, an orphan, had lived from

childhood with his Uncle Bob, and the two had always been inseparable. In winter they moved down to Denver where Steve went to school, but in the summer they came up to the mountains for the hunting and fishing that they both loved. Steve had gone to college, and finishing that, entered the School of Mines, at Golden, in which he had but one more year before graduation.

For the last two years, his uncle, instead of going down to the city, had remained in his mountain camp, attended solely by a faithful old negro servant who had been with them from the time of Steve's earliest remembrance, but whose last name he had never even heard, knowing him simply as "Hezekiah." Uncle Bob was by this time subject to these terrible "spells" of indigestion with the usual disastrous effects upon his heart.

Early in the spring of this year, while Steve was still in school, Uncle Bob had suffered an attack more severe than ever before, lying in a state of unconsciousness for two days. Steve

had not been notified of this, and when school was out, according to prearranged plans, had gone on a two-weeks trip to the coast with some friends. After that, coming up to the camp as usual for the summer, he was shocked to find his uncle confined to bed, prepared for death at any moment. In a sullen rage at outside interference, Hezekiah had left the camp some weeks before and the household was under the disastrous management of four uncongenial "flesh and blood relations," representing four different branches of the family tree.

Cousin Ben, who had just gone to return his nurse to the city, was one of these. Another was Aunt Tilly, who had set off that morning alone in Steve's roadster for a nurse of her selection. Then there was Uncle Penny Martin, who had taken the stage to town, determined personally to supervise the choice of the one who was to comfort poor old Bob in his last days on earth. The fourth of the kinsman's quartette was Miss Kezzy Lane, of somewhat doubtful connection but de-

termined loyalty, who, scorning all motors as contrivances of the devil, had walked three miles to a neighbor with a horse and buggy, to get him to take her in search of a proper nurse for the plainly dying man.

"Well, of all the nonsense!" cried Mary Martha, when these details had assembled themselves in her mind into some sort of coherence. "I never heard anything so silly! Why should they all go tearing off to fetch a nurse? Why not send one, and leave the rest here to take care of him? Why should they all be so anxious to do the selecting, anyhow? And why—"

Uncle Bob appeared with his usual startling suddenness. "Reason enough," he snapped. "The one that hires the nurse gets to boss the job."

Mary Martha smiled across the bed at Steve. "Then you're my boss, I suppose," she said amiably.

"Yes, sure," he assented, and took pleasure in the prospect.

Mary Martha considered the outline on the

bed, reflectively. "I don't believe he's dying at all," she said with decision. "I used to go to see all the dying people in the church—I don't mean they died in the church, I mean the dying members—and I never saw one that acted as he does."

"This is the first I've been alone with him. The others tag me around every step I take, and whenever I come here, they follow me. As soon as we all get out, Uncle Bob locks the door on us. They say he's out of his head. He's been wanting to get a lawyer up to make his will, and they won't let him. They say he isn't responsible, and they'll all swear to it." He looked at Mary Martha resentfully, as though the charge were her own. "He's not out of his head. Not by a long shot. You won't blame him for trying to keep that gang out, when you get to know them."

"Certainly, he's no more out of his head than—than you are," agreed Mary Martha, who was half inclined to think they both were. "It seems

very strange they won't let him make a will if they're so sure he's dying. Most people want them to make their wills before they die."

Again the gray face on the pillow. "Reason enough," he declared. "If I die without a will, all the Flesh-and-Bloods come in for equal shares. But if I get that will made, they're goners, and they know it. Serves me right, because I didn't do it years ago."

The long wail of a siren announced the stopping of the motor-bus down by the branching of the road.

"They're coming!" gasped the old man nervously, scurrying out of sight. "Lock the door—the—"

"It's locked," said Mary Martha soothingly. "You mustn't get so excited. It's very bad for you. Mr. Steve and I won't let them in."

Again the trio waited in silence for the signaling knock upon the door.

Uncle Penny Martin and his personally selected nurse were routed pretty much along the

general line of the campaign just preceding. And while they were quarreling, down-stairs, as to the proper amount of compensation due the disgruntled one for "this humiliation and needless waste of priceless time," as she so aptly put it, Aunt Tilly drove grandly up in Steve's smart roadster with the nurse she had obtained.

She, more aggressive than her predecessors, attempted to storm the citadel by force. But from behind the locked door, Steve and Mary Martha, with Uncle Bob sometimes blanketed, sometimes visible, but always urging them to stern resistance, successfully parried the attack. A nurse was in charge, she had been paid in advance, and her orders were to keep everybody out.

"One thing is certain," said Mary Martha when Aunt Tilly at last withdrew. "If you haven't got a doctor, I am in full authority, and everybody's got to do as I say. That's the law. And my order is, keep that whole crazy bunch out of this room if you have to use a gun. The first one

that enters that door without my permission, Mr. Steve, you've got to fire clear out of the house, and keep 'em out."

"Why me?" he demanded. "What can I do with that crowd? It's an awful bunch to do anything with. They sweep everything right before them."

"You're very strong, you can use force if you have to," she said recklessly. "It's orders, anyhow. And I think," she added more reasonably, "that we can effect our purpose by the use of a firm unflinching will.—That's Mental Science.—I can show you in the book if you don't believe it. You can do anything, if you set your mind on it hard enough.—Anyhow, they're out, and out they stay. You're the boss, now you see that they do it."

"Raise her salary," ordered the old man from the blankets. "She's worth ten a week more than I thought she was."

Mary Martha drew a chair close beside the bed, and fishing about beneath the covers, found

at last his clammy bony hand, and drew it within the clasp of her warm strong fingers.

"Listen, dear Uncle Bob," she said gently. "You've got to have harmony, peace and love. You've developed up to the point where you require it, and when you develop up to a thing you've got to have it. There's no getting around that. It's the Law of Karma.—That's Theosophy; you probably never heard of it, but I can show you the book if you don't believe it.—The Law of Karma. It never fails. It means you get just what you deserve, and as soon as you deserve something better, you get something better."

Uncle Bob fixed her with a steady sharp gray eye.

"Does it hit everybody, or just me,—Karma?" he asked meekly.

"Everybody in the world. It's like the law of the Medes and Persians. You can't get around it. As you sow, you've got to reap, sooner or later. You see, it's in the Bible as well as Theos-

ophy, so you can be orthodox if you prefer. It's the same thing, either way."

He raised himself a little, ready to dive from sight. "I'd hate like fury to have the Karma coming to me that some folks has," he said, as he disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

HEALING HASH

MARY MARTHA knew that eventually she must go down and confront the resentful Flesh-and-Bloods. She put it off as long as possible. She felt quite satisfied there in the room with Uncle Bob and Steve, but the necessities of her new profession were impelling. Her patient had had nothing to eat since early morning. He must be fed.

"I have to do it, so I may as well get it over with at once," she said dolefully to Steve. "Of course, you are coming along."

She was not received with much favor.

"Don't you wear a uniform?" asked Aunt Tilly suspiciously, noting the lovely heap of golden curls and the pretty curves of throat and arms displayed by the summer blouse.

Mary Martha smiled disarmingly. "Oh, no, indeed," she said. "I belong to the new school of—of Theotherapy. We try to eliminate every suggestion of illness, and hospitals, and drugs. Those are unhealthy thought-forms, and must be banished. We try to convey only images of perfect health and happiness. No uniforms!"

The silence that greeted this avowal was frankly unfriendly.

"All the books agree on that," she added quickly. "From Mental Science to Auto-Suggestion. The first rule is to banish every picture of sickness and fear, and to cultivate an image of perfect health. I can show you in half a dozen different methods, if you don't believe it."

"She's too pretty," said Uncle Penny suddenly. "Like as not the old fool'll fall in love with her. I'm not in favor of her on any terms."

"Neither am I," agreed Cousin Ben. "She's got them newfangled notions that I never did see any sense to."

"I'm sorry I sent Miss Smith back," said Aunt

Tilly. "I think we'd better make a change. What we need is a woman of strong religious principle, to prepare poor Bob for the future."

Mary Martha looked at Steve, seeking and finding reassurance in his sober friendly face.

"I'm sorry you don't like me," she said gently. "Because I am employed, and Mr. Bob has given me entire control of the situation. So I am going to stay, and I am afraid you'll have to do as I tell you whether you like me or not. Isn't that the way of things, Mr. Steve?"

Steve nodded quick affirmation. "That's it."

To their mutual surprise, her defiance, far from adding to the relatives' dislike of her, effected a speedy transformation in their conduct. Resentment gave place to a great eagerness to please her,—an attitude more baffling to Mary Martha and Steve than their former one of disapproval had been.

"She's quick, anyhow, and she don't look lazy, that's one thing," said Cousin Ben. "The nurse we had for Matty sat right down in a rocker, and

kept the whole passel of us waiting on her from morning till night."

"I can't say as I blame Bob," commented Uncle Penny judicially. "If you've got to have a woman tinkerin' around, nobody wants an old hatchet-face, like some."

"As soon as I saw you, my dear," said Aunt Tilly, "I said to myself, 'She's young, but she's got a sweet kind face.' You come up to my room when you finish your work, and I'll give you some tracts to read to poor Bob."

Mary Martha as she went to work was complacently gratified at her success in winning over these three combatants. She attributed the happy result entirely to the fact that she was in tune with the infinite, and rejoiced that she had attained such harmony of vibration. When, later on, she said she would like some one to kill and dress a chicken, that she might make a strengthening broth for her patient, Uncle Penny was on his way before she finished her request. She had no more than glanced at the kitchen stove, when

Cousin Ben grabbed the poker and shovel, and bestowed his undivided attentions on the fire for twenty feverish minutes. Aunt Tilly hastened to produce fresh eggs and milk from the ice-chest, and when Mary Martha waved them away with great decision, the astonished Aunt Tilly vented her dismay in only one great sigh.

Meanwhile, Mary Martha foraged about in the ice-chest, and finding there a generous T-bone steak, designed for the family consumption, she deftly cut the heart out of it and broiled it over the fire.

She was interrupted once. "I'll just look in on poor Bob, and have a word of prayer with him," said Aunt Tilly pleasantly. "Where is the key, my dear?"

"It is in my pocket," said Mary Martha gently. "It is going to stay there. Mr. Steve—"

Steve, thus appealed to, came gallantly to her assistance. "The nurse and Uncle Bob have agreed that for a while at least, he must have absolute quiet. No one is to enter that room

or even to speak to Uncle Bob from the hall, without the nurse's express permission. He's got to be let alone. And the first one that disobeys orders, will have to go home."

Aunt Tilly, Cousin Ben and Uncle Penny clustered together, with gurgles of feeble remonstrance.

"What—how—why—"

"Nurse's orders," he said succinctly. "And Uncle Bob told me to carry them out."

Steve's eyes narrowed slowly, and his pleasant lips lowered in an ominous fashion, while the muscles drew up in little hunches on his forearms.

"I never refused anything Uncle Bob asked yet," he went on slowly. "And I'm not beginning now. The first one that tries to get in there, has lost a summer camp."

Mary Martha bent joyously over the steak, delighting in his quiet unflinching force. She could not resist a light commending touch on his hand as he came to help her with the tray, and again

their eyes met, gray and blue, with quick camaraderie.

The tray she carried up to the sick room a little later was Mary Martha's best effort. There was a small, exquisitely browned bit of steak, generously buttered, two thin squares of crispest, brownest toast, half a dozen great red strawberries faintly sprinkled with sugar, and a cup of fragrant coffee with pure country cream. Even Mary Martha sniffed its aroma hungrily as she carried it up the stairs.

When she entered the room, she smiled to see the last gray hair disappearing from the pillow.

"I decided I won't eat," he mumbled crossly, from under the blanket. "When I think of an egg, I nearly crow. Go away, I'm awful sick."

Mary Martha laughed. "You trot up here and eat this steak while it is hot," she commanded. "Don't worry about eggs until I bring you one."

With pitiful eagerness, the gray head at once appeared. His eyes swept quickly across the tray, and his face brightened, but he sighed.

"I can't," he said. "It'll kill me. I can't digest things."

Mary Martha adjusted his pillows behind him, and tucked a towel beneath his hand.

"Now listen," she said, as he thrust a fork hopefully, fearfully, hungrily into the piece of steak. "You must trust me. You are dreadfully undernourished, and you've got to be fed, and well fed. That is, properly fed. This is proper feeding. It is the very exactly right kind of a meal for—what you've got. I—I worked for a while in a—in a medical house, and I learned the doctor book by heart, especially the worst diseases. This is just what you need, it will do you good, you will digest it perfectly, and feel much better after you have eaten."

He placed a bit of steak happily between his teeth.

"It's Auto-Suggestion," she said. "Just let your Unconscious believe it, and it's bound to work."

She sat quietly beside him, enjoying his child-

like pleasure in the dainty meal, her red lips clenched tightly together with the fervor by which she was willing, and wishing, and vibrating strength to him.

"I was hungry," he said, when he had finished the last crumb. "I can eat some more, I think."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry. Not yet. Just a little at a time, and often. That is the rule until you are stronger."

"I'll never be any stronger, I'm—"

"You must never argue with your nurse. According to all the methods in all the books, you are certainly going to get well. I suppose we ought to decide on one kind of cure, and then stick to it. For myself, I am very impartial, and I use them all in turn, just as I need them. But if you have any favorite, I'll cure you any way you like," she offered, with sweeping generosity.

He admitted that he had no choice, and was more than willing to be cured by any method she preferred.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what," she decided.

"As far as I can figure out, they're all very good. So I think if we work them in together, perhaps you will get well faster. The only thing you have to do is to believe that—that"—she hesitated shyly over the words—"that Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need. —That's Christian Science.—Then very often, every day, you must take a few deep breaths, and as you breathe in you must be conscious that you are breathing in the very essence of God, who is our infinite source of strength and health.—That's New Thought.—I won't have you do Auto-Suggestion for yourself just yet, I'll do it for you when you are asleep.—Do you dream?"

"Dream?"

"Yes, when you are asleep. Whenever you dream, you must be sure to tell me, and I will try to figure out what kind of a complex you have. That's very important.—It's Psycho-Analysis.—It's rather complicated, and some parts of it I am afraid—are not just—exactly proper, but the main thing is to dream, and if

you don't dream, you can make them up and it is just as good."

"I feel sleepy now," he said. "If I dream anything, I will tell you."

She darkened the room a little and opened the windows wide.

"If you're going down, be sure to lock that door," he cautioned anxiously.

She went out softly and locked the door behind her. Down-stairs she sought Steve.

"W—will you sell me things—fresh eggs, and milk, and sometimes vegetables?" she asked.

"Why, you are to eat with us," he told her quickly.

"I know, but—oh, there are lots of things one can do with milk and eggs, you know. I will pay for them. I want to—take them with me—in a basket. I must go for exercise regularly."

"Yes, of course."

Steve was very quiet, and his gray eyes were a little questioning as he filled a basket with eggs and milk and fruit.

"I will be back very soon. You keep the key while I am gone, but he is going to sleep now."

Steve stood in the doorway of the little stone cottage, following her with his eyes as she walked quickly down the road in the direction from which she had come only a few hours before.

CHAPTER X

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

IN THE shingled shack down the road, there was increasing uneasiness over Mary Martha's unaccountable absence.

"Though there's not a bit of use to worry," declared Vivien. "You know Mary Martha. If a Zulu magician came along in an airship and invited her to go to China, she'd think it was a divine opportunity, and off she'd go. We may as well eat."

So they had their dinner, and the girls washed the dishes. Still no Merry O! They wandered anxiously about on the banks of the river, and were planning to set off in a body in pursuit of her, when she and her basket appeared at last. She found a thrilled and inspiring audience for the strange story she had to tell, and she did it justice.

"I never saw any one so opposed to flesh and blood relations," she said in conclusion. "And when I saw how much it would help my chances to be without a family, I just washed my hands of the whole bunch of you right away. But never mind. Vivien can run the camp, and you'll be here, and I'll be there, and I'll come and call on you every day. Think of Fifty Dollars a Week!"

There was no fear of their discovery from the stone cottage, as there was a newer, shorter road to the highway, crossing the river by means of another bridge higher up, so that this trail which had brought them to the shingled shack was no longer in use. They did not wonder who owned the shingled shack, they did not care, it was enough for them that it was there, that it had been abandoned, and that it suited their purpose charmingly. On several trees roundabout were posted newly printed announcements that this was a part of the National Forest Reserve, and was subject to national laws.

As the "baby" still refused to run, they pushed it out of the road among the high boulders, and carried the rest of their supplies from the car to the shingled shack. Teddy and Vivien, and their father as well, anticipated a delightful vacation in the heart of the great mountains on the banks of the clamorous river; while over all their plans and hopes played the rosy light of Fifty Dollars a Week. Mary Martha was able to silence her father's concern for her safety among the curious folk in the cottage, by assuring him that any one could see to look at them that they were dreadfully respectable, and very religious, always reading tracts and quoting Scriptures, and that Aunt Tilly asked a very long blessing before she would eat a bite.

What harm could come to Merry O in that environment?

So she packed her clothes in the smallest of the three bags, and took with her, as service equipment, her books on *New Thought, Theosophy, Auto-Suggestion, Science Both Mental*

and Christian, and even *Psychic Powers and How to Develop Them.* She gave Vivien minute instructions how the camp should be conducted, and kissing them all a fond good-by went happily back to her lucrative, amusing, divinely demonstrated position in the gray stone cottage.

During her absence Miss Kezzy had returned from the city, and after the first shock of annoyance, of amazement, and of discomfiture, had hastily despatched the nurse she brought back to the city by way of the stage. After which, she settled herself in the stiffest chair in the dining-room, and waited to pass judgment on Mary Martha, who, appearing in her presence, amiably submitted to inspection, revolving slowly at her request and then sat down with her permission.

Miss Kezzy then inquired stiffly as to her age, experience, religious affiliations, moral standards in general, and in conclusion wished to know if it didn't make her nervous to be shut up in a

room with a half, if not wholly, demented old man who was likely to die on her hands any minute.

Having proceeded faithfully through this catechism Mary Martha ran quickly up to Uncle Bob, whom she found, as she expected, entirely buried beneath the blankets. At her solicitation he ventured slowly out.

"You look just fine," she said warmly. "You feel lots better already, just as I told you. Don't you?"

He admitted, almost reluctantly, that he felt pretty tolerable, but was still hungry, and was not at all patient about waiting for her to prepare his supper. This consisted of a creamy baked potato, a bowl of steaming chicken broth, with a very stingy portion of the white meat, and more of the crisp buttered toast.

"No pains if I eat it?" he asked anxiously.

"Never a single pain," she assured him confidently. "It is good food, well cooked. It is just the nourishment you need. You will enjoy

eating it, and will feel better afterward. That's the way Mr. Coué talks to his patients, and it always comes true for him, so it's bound to come true for us.—It's Auto-Suggestion."

When he had finished and was resting comfortably, Mary Martha went down again and ate her supper with the Flesh-and-Bloods, as she always called them to herself. They were very pleasant to her and invited her to call them by their titles of relationship, as Steve did, to simplify the matter of names. By the time they arrived at dessert, she had courage to suggest that from that time forward they all desist, even down-stairs, from inquiring in doleful accents as to the condition of "poor Bob."

She said she would give the information every day without being asked, and began by stating that he was fine and looked very much better already. The amiability with which they acceded to her request was surprising, but she was grateful that she was spared an argument.

After supper, she asked to have a cot made

up for her inside the door of Uncle Bob's room. "He doesn't really need me," she said, "but he doesn't realize yet that he is getting well, and I think he will feel safer to have me with him—on the spot."

Steve protested.

"You need your sleep, Miss McAllister, you will not rest properly in the room with Uncle Bob. He talks in his sleep sometimes, and it will keep you awake."

"Oh, just for a few nights, until he knows for sure he is better. I want him to be easy in his mind, you know. And nothing ever disturbs me. I sleep very soundly."

So a cot, with mattress and blankets, was produced as she desired, and Steve carried it into his uncle's room and helped her to make it up beside the door. Then they sat down in the low rockers, he with the daily papers which came up every afternoon with the mail, she with her books, while the old man lay flat on his back, watching them both with sharp gray eyes when

they were absorbed in their reading, but sliding from sight if either of them looked in his direction.

Mary Martha was torn between conflicting desires in choosing a book that night. Naturally, it was no less than her duty to choose *Health* by one route or another, but her own selfish wishes inclined her to *Success in Life and Love.* In the end, she compromised, reading fitfully from one and then the other.

When she saw that Uncle Bob was beginning to grow sleepy, she put her book on the table beside the bed, folded newspapers about the light until the room was in heavy shadow, and sank again into her chair at his side.

"Day by day, in every way, you're getting better and better," she said, slowly, monotonously, drowsily, again and again, now and then interspersing it with an occasional "Divine love always has met and always will meet every human need."

Steve's eyes upon her during this recital were

quizzically amused. "You are mixing your methods, aren't you?" he asked when she had finished. "It seems you appeal partly to Uncle Bob's own mental power, and partly to God. All things work together,—is that the gist of your system?"

"All creative, or curative power, is God," she said glibly. "It says He breathed into us the breath of life,—that is God,—God in us. All through the Bible it says we are children of God. So whether we work on the creative principle within us, or the same infinite principle, God, that is all about us on every hand,—it is the same thing, after all, and leads to perfect health."

When Steve went out, Mary Martha straightened the blankets on the bed, and turned out the light. She forgot the copy of *Science and Health* she had left on the edge of the table at the bedside.

The small room adjoining Uncle Bob's on the right had been given to Mary Martha for dressing, and she went softly in and prepared

herself for bed. It took but a few moments, and before Uncle Bob himself was sleeping, noiselessly, wrapped in her old flannel kimono, she crept back to the cot and slipped in between the sheets. The door beside the cot that led into the hall outside she left slightly ajar.

She did not go to sleep for a long time. The dashing of the river on the rocks below sounded reverberatingly in her ears. The strange events of the day danced irritatingly vivid in her mind, —the stalled motor, the shirt-sleeved Steve and his excited call, her curious entrance into the gray cottage, the series of returning relatives and nurses,—it was all like a wild, wild dream.

But Fifty Dollars a Week! *"Prosperity, and how to attract it."* Mary Martha smiled contentedly into the darkness.

Led! She had been not led but dragged by physical force into this position. Ah, truly, to one who walks in faith, a door of opportunity must open. She was very tired and when she fell asleep at last she slept heavily.

She was aroused suddenly, with a strange sense of oppression, of nervous dread. She held her breath, listening. At first she heard only the pounding of the water on the rocks, and the sighing of the wind in the pines, then the heavy regular breathing of Uncle Bob in his bed on the opposite side of the room. But that was not all. She was conscious of something else. Panic seized upon Mary Martha, and she shivered with icy fear. For she could hear other breathing, low, strained and well controlled. With wide terrified eyes she stared about her, trying to pierce the darkness of the room. She could see nothing, she must be dreaming,—such a thing could not be. No, she was not dreaming! She heard it distinctly, that hushed, strained, nervous breathing, not at all the steady respiration that comes with sleep.

Struggling to throw off the growing sense of horror, she sat up. "Who—who—who is there?" she asked clearly.

There was a startled gasp quite near her, out-

side the open door, the sound of feet that ran quickly down the hall, the distant soft closing of a door and then silence.

Mary Martha turned on the light, and ran about the room, looking in every corner, in the closet, under the bed. The room was empty. Uncle Bob, awakened by the noise, slid promptly out of sight.

"Oh, I am sorry I woke you up," she said penitently, her courage restored by the steady light. "I—I thought I heard something."

"Maybe I talked in my sleep," he muttered, beneath the covers.

"No, you didn't. You were sleeping beautifully. I—I won't do it again."

"Maybe you struck somebody's complex," he volunteered helpfully.

Mary Martha smiled at that. "Come on out and get the air," she coaxed. "I'm going right back to bed."

She turned off the light and lay down once more on her cot beside the door. But she was

not deceived. Some one, she knew, had been at that door, stealthily, stealthily watching there, listening,—for some purpose Mary Martha did not understand.

She could not sleep. She felt, humorously, like sliding under the covers as Uncle Bob himself did in an emergency, but finally, remembering the rule for insomnia, she gave herself quite up to the nervous fancy and the fear until they wore themselves out after a time. Then, in a whisper that could not be heard a half-dozen inches from her lips, she repeated the soothing formula, and put herself to sleep.

It must have been two hours later that there was a sudden sharp movement in the bed across the room, and Mary Martha, lifting her head quickly, was just in time to see Uncle Bob catch up her book from the table beside him, and throw it far out the window, where it struck on the stone ledge and then bounded to the ground below.

Mary Martha cried out faintly, and a moment

later, Steve, his bathrobe flapping about his knees, ran down to see what had happened.

"What's the matter?" he asked from the doorway, and receiving no answer, switched on the light and looked about.

Uncle Bob, far under the covers, was inert and motionless, breathing heavily, almost snoring. The book was gone from the table. Mary Martha sat erect in the middle of the cot, her kimono drawn about her shoulders, her accusing eyes upon the thin outline on the bed.

"He—he threw my book out the window," she said, almost tearfully.

"He— Is he asleep?" Steve asked softly.

A snore from the bed seemed to answer that he was.

"No, he's not! He's just pretending. He threw my *Science and Health* out the window as hard as he could."

"I didn't either," came meekly from beneath the covers.

Steve crossed the room and stood beside the

bed, looking down upon his uncle in great perplexity. And all at once, humbly enough, he emerged.

"I didn't either. But if I did, I did it in my sleep," he insisted.

"If you don't want me to stay here, and nurse you, and cure you, why did you hire me, and pay me in advance?" Mary Martha asked bitterly. "I'll get up and go right now, if that's the way you feel about me."

"Don't you let her go, Steve," the old man ordered quickly, and slid at once beneath the blankets.

Steve set himself to the task of reassuring the offended Mary Martha. "He wouldn't throw your book out the window,—I know he wouldn't. He has taken a great fancy to you, and wouldn't have you leave for anything. You mustn't leave. He couldn't stand it. None of us could stand it. It must have been a—a—a—"

"A what?"

"I don't know. I can't imagine what it was,

I'm sure. Maybe he did it in his sleep, as he said. You won't leave, will you?"

When Mary Martha, swiftly relenting, promised to remain, Steve turned off the light and returned to his own room at the other end of the hall.

Sleep for Mary Martha now was out of the question. Nervous, ill at ease, wondering what lay back of all the mysterious happenings, even the roar of the river, before so sweet to her ears, now sounded sinister and foreboding.

She crept noiselessly across the room to the window through which Uncle Bob had thrown her book with so much force, and crouched there on her knees staring out over the rocky ledge beyond the pines, beyond the river, to the farther blackness where the mountains lay.

Suddenly there was a little movement, a rustling of the dry pine needles on the ground beneath her, a faint stirring of the darkness. Mary Martha stared intently at the spot, every nerve alert. From behind the rocks beneath her the

vague outline of a man's figure, shadowy in the blackness of the night, came slowly into view. It moved hesitatingly, uncertainly, stopping at every step to listen, and disappeared at last beyond the corner of the house.

CHAPTER XI

MALPRACTISE

AS SOON as daylight dawned, Mary Martha dressed and ran down-stairs very softly. She found her *Science and Health* rather the worse for its experience of the night, the covers soiled, some pages torn. It was lying on the rock directly over the river,—very little more strength in the old man's arm would have sent it down into the swirling current. She noticed that the foliage on the stone embankment that led to the ledge outside the window was badly crushed and torn, not at all as it had been left the day previous after Steve's quick and agile ascent.

She went slowly up-stairs again, thinking of these things, and crossing to the window stood looking gravely out over the narrow rocky ledge some three or four feet wide. Lying on the

rock, quite near the outer edge, was a small white button, which she knew had not been there the day before. Regardless of the curious eyes that watched her from the bed, she climbed carefully over the sill, clinging to the window frame for support, and reached for the button. It was a small, plain, valueless thing, the kind that is used on cheap every-day shirts for men. Its only significance lay in the fact that it had not been on that ledge the day before.

Back in the room again she held it out to Uncle Bob, and their eyes met gravely.

"As far as *Science and Health* is concerned," she said soberly, "it was a plain case of malpractise, and it must never happen again. There isn't a sentence in the book to recommend such use as that. It isn't scientific, and it isn't Christian."

Uncle Bob was motionless and silent.

"You must be a pretty fair shot," she went on admiringly, "to hit the window so squarely from where you lay in bed. I like that. But

we've got to practise *Science and Health* in the prescribed way hereafter. To-night, I'll leave a flat iron where you can reach it handily."

Uncle Bob wriggled down under the blanket, but not before she had seen the sudden uncontrollable grin that brightened his thin pinched features.

She gave him his breakfast quietly, a delicious breakfast of oatmeal, cooked for hours, with pure cream, toasted brown bread and coffee, and afterward had hers with the rest of the household down-stairs. As she had requested, no one voiced a word of inquiry as to the present condition of poor Bob, but Mary Martha, appreciating their curiosity, was quick to gratify it.

"Oh, he is just fine this morning. He had a splendid night, and ate a good breakfast. He looks much better, and will soon be getting up for exercise."

There seemed to be a sort of tension in the air, a tension she could feel but had no grounds on which to formulate a comment. During the

entire meal, but one reference was made to the patient. It came from Uncle Penny.

"Did he talk in his sleep, nurse? Did he say anything?"

Aunt Tilly kicked him beneath the table, Miss Kezzy frowned him into confusion with a roll of her snapping black eyes, and Cousin Ben effectually turned the subject by a severe spasm of coughing. But after the confusion, it was Steve who reverted again to the subject which had appeared so distasteful.

"I was afraid he would keep you awake, Miss McAllister. Sometimes he mumbles along steadily the whole night through."

"He did mutter to himself a time or two," she said. "But mostly he was very quiet, and did not disturb me in the least."

It seemed to her, as she spoke, that a little understanding flash went about the table, a flash that began just short of Steve, and stopped just short of her. Obviously, he as well as herself, was not in the inner circle of knowledge.

As she went up-stairs after breakfast, she was overtaken by Aunt Tilly, who quietly, but insistently, led her down the hall to her own room, and closed the door behind them. Aunt Tilly had plainly rehearsed in her own mind the subject she intended broaching, for she spoke without hesitation.

"As you know, Miss McAllister, I took a fancy to you the minute I saw you. I says to myself, 'There's a girl of sense and judgment, and she'll use both.' "

Mary Martha was grateful, but non-committal.

"Now, I want to say a few things to you, confidential, and I may say, if you want to act fair with me, nobody being any the wiser, it's worth ten dollars a week to me, and as much to you, and I'll pay you that, and gladly."

This surprised Mary Martha. From what she had seen of the Flesh-and-Bloods she had strongly inferred they were as one in their abhorrence of financial expenditure—on their own

account. She was alert, and on guard in a moment.

"Now, in the first place, it's no more than fair that you should understand the lay of things about here. It's like this. Poor Bob, being out of his mind, gets a sudden notion to make a will. Now does it stand to reason that any man that lived as long as Bob lived in his right senses without making a will, ought to make one when he's sick and weak and half crazy? Naturally, no. It's like this. Making no will, of course, he wanted his property—not that he's got much, but such as he has—to be divided fair and honest between all concerned. Which is no more than fair anyhow. But when he got down weak and low and out of his mind, there's some as might try to get him to make a will. Of course, I mention no names, being as it's all in the family, as you might say. Naturally, we says, no. So now, we want you to watch, and make a quick report to us if he begins to hint for a lawyer again."

"I see. But he is much better now. He will not want a lawyer."

"But if he does. He may get another spell any minute. If he does, nurse, if he does. And there's another thing. He—he talks. Talks in his sleep, as they were saying at the table. It's one of his weak-minded habits, and he can't help it. Now, if he talks in his sleep, I want to know it—I mean, supposing maybe he takes a hankering to have things done,—even silly things,—I—I'd be perfectly willing, nurse, perfectly willing. I believe in humoring 'em when they're nearly dead. So if he says anything kind of queer, I want you to tell me immediately,—and nobody else, of course. I'd be only too glad to make his last days easy. And as I said, it's worth ten dollars a week on the side for me to have a nice smart honest girl right on the job."

"But I don't think he will—"

"Now, once or twice, when he was just going off bad, he said something—er—something about —hiding. 'Course, it's only a sick man's notion,

but if he took it into his head he wanted anything hid, I'd hide it, and glad of—I mean, glad to do anything to please him, even out of his head. But say nothing to any one, especially not to Steve, he being young and irresponsible anyhow, and not understanding the whims of the old and dying. And especially, nurse, you listen for anything he may say about hidings,—one way or the other,—either coming or going."

"I can not take money for such a thing, Aunt Tilly. It would be very wrong. It is kind of you, but I can not. If he should be delirious, or —or mention anything in his sleep you ought to know, of course I will tell you, gladly. But I can not take any money except my salary."

No amount of argument could change her from this decision, but as her attitude in general seemed friendly, even grateful, and singularly free from any display of curiosity or suspicion, Aunt Tilly felt she could safely trust her.

In the course of the morning, with every appearance of deep-dyed secrecy, Mary Martha was

privately approached by three others of the household in turn, Cousin Ben, Uncle Penny and Miss Kezzy. The substance of their desires was curiously at one,—a plea for her sole and solemn confidence; a particular interest as to lawyers and wills; deep solicitude in regard to "hidings" of any sort,—either things hidden or about to be hidden,—and emphatic warning to "say nothing to any one, especially young Steve."

If the situation had not borne such unmistakable evidence of a sinister underlying purpose, Mary Martha would have laughed at the whole affair, and considered it only amusing. But the terrifying memories of the night before remained with her too distinctly. Only one fact in all the mysterious confusion was clear to Mary Martha. Evidently they believed that Steve would make good his threat to turn bodily out of the house any one of them who ventured inside his uncle's room, and they dared not risk such eviction. In this extremity, they were forced to rely upon Mary Martha to furnish them the in-

formation they desired. Further than that, Mary Martha could not go.

In her efforts to restore her patient's shattered confidence in his own physical strength, she was warmly seconded and aided by Steve. With reasonable care, she was convinced that Uncle Bob's condition was not alarming, and that he could certainly be restored to perfect health. It was not now that he was in pain, but that he had acquired an abiding horror of pain, which he could not throw off unaided. It was not that he was suffering from any particular disease, but that every shattered nerve in his weakened body quivered with the dread of illness.

Against this condition, Mary Martha, backed by the books in which she had unbounded confidence, was blithely, serenely aggressive. Reverting to the "common sense" advocated in the shadowy past by Jeremy Lanton, of New Paris, Iowa, she selected her patient's food with painstaking care, preparing every morsel of it herself in the most sanitary and healthful fashion,

and serving it to him in appetizing and pleasing style. She kept the room bright and airy, and rather over-emphasized her usual habits of cheery confidence. For the rest, she was content to go slowly in her effort to restore his broken faith. Whenever he made an extra effort for himself she was warm in her words of praise, and at her commendation, he blushed like a boy with delight and hastened to hide his confusion beneath the shelter of the friendly sheets.

When Mary Martha set out that afternoon for her necessary period of freedom, this time with a basket of fresh spring vegetables, Steve asked, half shyly, if he might not take a little exercise as well, at the same time and in the same direction. Mary Martha flushed nervously, stammering as she gave him to understand that she must be alone to hold her thought on the image of perfect health she was constructing for Uncle Bob. Steve was obliged to accept the explanation, but he did not forget her stammering confusion.

She found her father and sisters very comfortable in their acceptance of government hospitality, and gaily entered upon a spicy recital of her experiences in the gray stone cottage. The girls had a thousand questions to ask, about Uncle Bob, about the handsome Steve, about the funny Flesh-and-Bloods.

The story of their own experience was one of unalloyed happiness. The girls had been wading in the river, their father had caught three darling little speckled trout, they had seen a mountain goat, and in the night they were awakened by a terrible roaring which could have been nothing less than a lion. The girls declared it was like sleeping in a boat, in their room just over the river, for the rushing and booming of the water fairly shook the shingled shack on the rocks above.

And then they showed her delightedly, for the third time, all over their picturesque home, which, after one night of occupation, they felt was theirs indeed.

To Mary Martha the shingled shack, after the elaborate perfection of the stone cottage, was very primitive, lacking as it did all the modern conveniences with which the other was equipped, and being constructed on rough, although artistic lines. The cellar room had been ingeniously contrived as a garage, and their father had already repaired the hinges of the door and fastened it with a lock of his own connivance.

Leading down the outside of the cottage from the room their father occupied, was a charmingly quaint stairway built in the rocks, and at Teddy's eager insistence Mary Martha ran lightly down to see for herself just how lovely it was.

"We can sit on the steps and fish when father cuts us longer poles," cried Teddy.

After Mary Martha had inspected their larder, made a few further suggestions as to Vivien's keeping of the house, cautioned Teddy most particularly not to fall from the stone steps into the river and get drowned,—which was a terrible thought-form for her to be sending out, as

she remembered afterward,—she set off up the road toward the stone cottage.

Coming down the rocky path from the house, his rifle over his arm, she met Steve.

"Are you tired?" he asked. "Won't you walk a bit with me? Maybe we'll find some shooting. Uncle Bob's sound asleep, I just came from his room." He handed her the key with a smile. "I locked the door behind me, although the Flesh-and-Bloods seem suddenly almost human. You must be a good fairy, you seem to have charmed them."

Mary Martha turned about very willingly. She loved the winding road among the high boulders and the pines, but she was careful to lead the way upward at the cross-road instead of down the other way toward the shingled shack on the abandoned trail.

They sat on the rocks by the river a while, listening to the booming of the water, to the stirring of the wind in the pines, and talked of many things. It was Mary Martha, never forgetful

And talked of many things

of the responsibilities connected with fifty dollars a week, who rose at last reluctantly, and said they must go back.

Walking slowly, happily along, they turned suddenly from behind a great boulder and came face to face with Vivien and Teddy, who after Mary Martha had left them had been seized irresistibly with the desire for further exploration, and mischance had brought them along this road.

"Oh, Merry O!" cried Teddy, forgetting the sisters were to be as strangers, and then, as Vivien nudged her sharply with her elbow, she clasped her hands across her lips and looked frightened.

After the first startled, impulsive movement, Mary Martha was not disconcerted. She tilted her slender chin at a higher angle and walked demurely on, never the flicker of a lash disturbing her nonchalance. Vivien flushed a vivid scarlet as they passed, and Steve glanced with quickly appraising eyes from the confused and blushing girls to the imperturbable Mary Martha beside

him. He was not inquisitive by nature and asked no questions, but took up the conversation where it had been dropped.

Making another sharp turn in the road, where they again came in view of the stone cottage, only a little way ahead, they stopped short, and Mary Martha clutched at Steve's arm, while for a moment both stood as though all power of motion were lost.

Up over the rocky ledge, outside the window of the sick room, they saw Uncle Bob himself, leaning out over the sill, slowly swinging his arm back and forth from left to right.

"Oh, what now!" gasped Mary Martha.

"They—they all say he's crazy, and maybe he is," muttered Steve, beneath his breath.

"Maybe he's calling for help!"

Steve caught Mary Martha's hand in his, and they broke into a dead run for the cottage.

CHAPTER XII

TERRORS BY NIGHT

THE house was very still, and there was no one to be seen in the down-stairs rooms, as Mary Martha and Steve, still hand in hand, ran through the hall and up the stairs. There was silence, too, behind the locked door of the sick room.

Steve knocked nervously. "Uncle Bob!" he called. "Let us in! Quick!"

A throaty snore sounded from within, aside from which there was no answer.

Steve knocked again. "Uncle Bob!"

"Door's locked," came feebly then. "Use your key."

Mary Martha's hands shook so she could not hold the key, but Steve finally found the keyhole and threw open the door. Together they sprang into the room,—and stopped aghast. Uncle Bob

was on the bed beneath the blankets exactly as they had left him, breathing heavily.

Steve jerked the covers from his face, and he looked up at them innocently, blinking his eyes as from the glare of light.

"You're awful noisy about it," he muttered. "Woke me all up."

Mary Martha looked at Steve, Steve looked at Mary Martha, and they both looked at Uncle Bob. Certainly there he lay on the bed, as helpless, as meek, as gray, as ever. They went to the window. Below them the narrow ledge of rock stretched away from the wall, and then descended sharply to the ground.

Not five minutes before they had seen Uncle Bob in that very spot, bending out over the sill, waving his arm back and forth, the loosely flapping white sleeve of his night shirt showing plainly in the bright light, or had they seen him?

"Did you see it, too?" Steve asked, at last.

Mary Martha nodded solemnly. "I saw it," she declared.

They marched once more to the bed, but the sheet was drawn neatly up over the thin face, and the heavy breathing from beneath discouraged further investigation at that moment. Mary Martha and Steve sat weakly down in the low chairs on opposite sides of the bed, and gave themselves up to serious thoughts.

It was quite late in the afternoon that Mary Martha decided her patient would be the better for further exercise. Knowing he had been at the window, she was convinced that he lacked not so much strength as confidence, because on the spur of the moment, without waiting to consider his heart, he could evidently put forth great and harmless effort. The thing to be done, then, was to make him realize that he could exert the same effort premeditatedly and with conscious determination, suffering no ill effects therefor.

"Come on out, Uncle Bob," she called cheerfully. "You are going to sit by the window a while, and enjoy the view."

Uncle Bob was frightened. He thought at

once of his heart. He held a pitifully protective thin gray hand to his side, as Mary Martha and Steve gently assisted him across the room and into the chair made soft with pillows, expecting to feel at once that quick painful stab through his heart. He looked at his nurse with anxious eyes.

Mary Martha was gentle but firm. "You are all right," she said. "Believe me, it will not hurt you. It will do you good. You have eaten nourishing food, you haven't had a sign of indigestion, your pulse is full and steady. Don't worry."

He could not control the nervous tremor in his knees, and would not be induced to remove his hand from his side. In a few moments he was covered with cold perspiration. Mary Martha felt his heart.

"Fine, steady beating," she said reassuringly. "No pressure, no pain, it is fine, it is getting better all the time. This will do you good, it will make you stronger."

In a few moments she helped him back to bed again, and when he slid gratefully out of sight, she sat beside him.

"Remember, it did you good," she repeated. "Now that you are eating proper food at proper hours, you have got to be all right. You'll be stronger to-morrow."

His accusing gray eyes appeared. "I always ate good food, and lots of it."

"Yes, you did," Mary Martha was gently derisive. "I know all about the way you lived. You ate fried meat and fried potatoes three times a day. It's a wonder you aren't dead, and I really think it's no more than you deserve, but I'm awfully glad you're not."

He withdrew from that attack without argument.

"Meat twice a week is plenty for a man of your age," she went on in a didactic tone. "As you go higher and higher in spiritual development, you will require less and less rich stimulating food like meat. Eventually you will give

it up entirely, I suppose, when you develop high enough."

He came up again when she said that. "I expect to stop developing just short of the point, miss," he told her.

"You can't stop when once you get a good start. You work yourself into the cycle and have to keep on, higher and higher. It's the rule, you know."

Mary Martha was singularly broad-minded in her method of handling sickness. There was so much to be commended in all the systems, and she could not bear to neglect anything helpful and good. But there was one point on which all her authorities were agreed, so she held that as a central sun, and radiated from it without discrimination into the realms of New Thought, Christian Science, Auto-Suggestion, and Mental Healing. Psycho-Analysis she rather slighted, for she wasn't at all sure it was respectable, and she didn't understand it very well anyhow.

The pivot on which her method revolved was

the image of perfect health. She clung to this image herself, she forced Uncle Bob to regard it, and as far as was humanly possible she flaunted it in the faces of the skeptical Flesh-and-Bloods. She banished every thought, every picture and as much as she could, every fear of sickness.

Fortunately, Uncle Bob was greatly pleased with Mary Martha, and although he received most of her attentions by sliding promptly from sight, he listened eagerly to her every word of confident assurance. Best of all, he believed what she said. That was the great thing in Mary Martha's favor, his faith in her. And Mary Martha, from her untiring study of all the methods, knew that to be the deciding factor in every one,—faith,—in something,—in God, (as she herself proclaimed), in the system of vibration, in Cosmic Consciousness, in one's own subjective mind. Of course coming down to simple faith in humble Mary Martha was a great drop, but surely it was better than no faith at all.

The second evening was spent as the one pre-

ceding, but when Steve said good night and left her, Mary Martha looked anxiously about the room and in the halls and out from the windows. She was not afraid, she told herself repeatedly, she did not vibrate to fear, she had no thought-forms of fear. But just the same that first night had had its disturbing moments, and she desired no repetition of them.

She carefully moved her books beyond reach of the bed, ranging them neatly on the desk in the corner, and smiled when she saw the old man watching furtively with one gray eye above the coverlet.

"If you hear any sudden noises in the night, don't get nervous," he cautioned kindly.

Mary Martha stopped short and frowned at him. "What kind of a sudden noise do you intend to make to-night?" she demanded.

"This is a mountain country," he answered evasively, "and the rocks have a habit of tumbling off one another most unexpected; like to raise the dead."

"Maybe you think it was an earthquake heaved my book out of the window last night," she suggested.

But as he was out of sight and motionless, she turned off the lights. She left the door into the hallway a scant three inches ajar, and moved her cot across the opening so that no one could get in without awakening her. Then she got into bed and felt secure.

The house continued blissfully quiet, and Mary Martha, really very tired, fell soon into a heavy sleep, lulled by the steady rushing of the water below.

Hours later she was awakened by a noise, a sharp staccato cry that sounded almost human, a scraping on the rocks, a heavy crash; then silence again. In an instant, Mary Martha was on her feet, switching on the lights. Uncle Bob was completely covered by the sheets; his thin form heaving up and down quite shook the bed.

"Are—are you laughing?" gasped Mary Martha.

Instantly the heaving ceased, and a mild snore was her answer. But as Mary Martha knew her eccentric patient snored only when he was fully awake, she cast a look of withering scorn at his sheet-covered figure and hurried to the window. Outside, except for the water and the wind, everything was quiet, an unbroken pall of black lying over mountain and rock and pine. But as she knelt there, listening, wondering, from the deep blackness below came a low moaning, perhaps of suffering, perhaps but one of the many breathless noises of the mountain night.

"Is—is anybody there?" she called, oh, very softly.

There was a slow dragging through the leaves, a crackling of dry pine needles on the ground, the occasional falling of a pebble as though some wounded animal were slinking off to cover in the darkness.

"The place is haunted," whispered Mary Martha.

"I'll bet there was a mountain goat fell off

the rocks and skinned himself. Awful awkward beasts, mountain goats," volunteered the old man in a startlingly clear and decisive voice. "The woods is full of animals sneaking around. Nothing to be afraid of. Go on back to bed."

Mary Martha looked at him. Then she turned to the desk where her books were piled and picked one up reflectively. *"Psychic Powers, and How to Develop Them,"* she read the title aloud. She looked again at the strange old man.

"I'm going to develop my psychic powers so I can read your mind," she declared. "I just believe you've got a lot of things up your sleeve that nobody has any notion of."

In the face of this onslaught there was nothing for Uncle Bob to do but withdraw as gracefully as possible to his favorite retreat, which he did at once, answering her only with the faint snore which proclaimed his disinclination for further talk.

In spite of her fear, Mary Martha could but laugh at the ludicrousness of it all. On a sudden

impulse, she ran her hand lightly over the coverlet, where his arm should be. "You're an awfully nice old thing," she said, in a friendly voice. "I wish you'd tell me all your secrets."

As Uncle Bob did not reply Mary Martha returned to bed, but left the light burning brightly. There was no further disturbance that night in the gray stone cottage by the river.

CHAPTER XIII

BOOSTING KARMA

UNCLE Bob was in unusually good spirits the next morning and showed great improvement in every way. His eyes were brighter, his voice more mellow, and his face seemed to have lost something of its gray gauntness of color and contour. He submitted amiably to Mary Martha's ministrations, followed her devotedly through a series of "Day by day, in every way, I'm getting better and better," and then said he was hungry and asked her to hurry his breakfast.

He ate with keen relish the bowl of berries she brought him, the dish of cereal and cream, the toast and coffee, and suggested pleasantly that once in a while he fancied a nice piece of fried ham for his breakfast. To this she replied, in the same pleasant manner, that he had now

developed so far beyond the stage of fried-ham-for-breakfast that she would be ashamed to offer it to him.

"How's everybody down-stairs this morning?" he asked, adroitly turning the conversation at that point.

It was the first time he had shown a spark of interest in anything that went on down-stairs, although all the Flesh-and-Bloods were his guests after a fashion. Mary Martha was greatly encouraged and felt that at last her progress was a matter of fact as well as faith.

"Every one's fine, I suppose," she answered. "I didn't see any one but Miss Kezzy. The others are not up yet. She was all right." Then acting on a sudden impish impulse she added, "Miss Kezzy says if there is anything you want hidden, she'll be glad to undertake it for you."

His thin lips parted with astonishment, once, twice, then he gasped and sank quickly from sight.

When Mary Martha went down for her break-

fast, she found intense excitement prevailing below stairs. Uncle Penny, they told her, had risen early, hoping to catch a speckled trout for his breakfast, but on his way to the river had slipped on a loose rock and fallen heavily down the bank. In addition to the general shock and nervous strain of such a fall for one of his years, he had twisted his right foot rather badly and it was now greatly swollen and inflamed. With true spartan courage, rather than disturb the household by calling for aid and fearing the possible disastrous consequences to poor Bob, he had crept back to his bed and waited for daylight before asking assistance.

Mary Martha hastened to bathe the bruised and swollen foot, bandaging it tightly, and gave structions to Aunt Tilly and Miss Kezzy about keeping it in hot applications during the day. Uncle Penny was grateful for her solicitude. He assured her again and again that he had known from the first she was a fine girl, and he sent his love to poor Bob, asking her to tell him that

if he was at all concerned about any hidings of any sort, he, Uncle Penny, in spite of his affliction, would cheerfully undertake his errands. This last, he informed her, was of course in strictest confidence.

Leaving him, Mary Martha ran quickly up to Uncle Bob again. Evidently her light footfalls made no sound on the bear skin rugs in the hallway, for as she deftly turned the lock and swung wide the door, she was horrified to find the bed pulled half-way out from its usual place against the wall, and Uncle Bob himself hanging over the edge of it, his head far under, his shoulders lunging forward.

"Mercy!" cried Mary Martha, thinking at first he must have fallen.

Uncle Bob, with flaming cheeks, squirmed his way back into bed and under the covers. Even he had not the assurance to offer up a snore of defiance in the face of this discovery. Mary Martha moved the bed carefully back to its proper position against the wall, adjusted the

blankets and then, quite unable to resist the temptation, got softly down on hands and knees and peered under the bed to discover what could have prompted her patient to such unwonted exertion.

Her curiosity went unrewarded. She saw simply the bare floor of dark brown wood, one corner of a trailing sheet on the other side, and the wainscoting of the same dark brown wood in which the whole interior of the cottage was finished. More mystified than ever, she rose to her feet, flushing vividly to find a sharp gray eye watching her from the pillow. It disappeared at once, and she set quickly to work straightening the room.

"Uncle Penny had an accident," she began sociably, after a little.

The blankets heaved suddenly, and a pair of interested gray eyes appeared.

"Oh! Uncle Penny, eh?" And immediately he went off into a series of deep dry chuckles.

"Are you laughing?" Mary Martha demanded, as she had once before in the night-time.

Uncle Bob was indignant. "Certainly not. I just feel sorry! Poor Penny!"

Mary Martha could not help laughing, the satisfaction in his gray eyes and the hearty chuckles so plainly belied his feeling sorry for Uncle Penny's accident. But she proceeded to detail the event of the morning as she had heard it down-stairs and ended with Uncle Penny at that moment propped up in a big chair, a bandaged foot, and the two women relatives armed with hot applications in attendance.

Twice during this recital, Uncle Bob retired beneath the covers, which silently rose and fell a time or two. After which he reappeared, a little flushed, his thin gray hair disheveled, to hear the rest of the story. When Mary Martha had quite finished, his gray eyes searched her face.

"Pretty steady girl on your feet?" he asked.

"Yes, very steady."

"Think maybe you could climb out my window on that rocky ledge and feel your way about and

maybe do—a little—picking up?" he asked anxiously.

"I am sure I can."

"'Course, a stiff old codger like me—or Uncle Penny—'d likely have to take off our shoes and go in our sock-feet, but you youngsters have got more nerve."

"I can do it with my shoes on," she said confidently.

He withdrew from sight. "Seems to me I saw a lot of tacks lying about on that ledge," he said distinctly. "They ought to be picked up from there. Anybody stepping around accidental might get on a tack and have a bad tumble."

Mary Martha carefully got through the window and out upon the rocky ledge. She felt her way cautiously about and, as he had said, found tacks in great abundance, tacks of a particularly sharp-pointed variety, lying all about, up and down. In a way it made her think of a barbed-wire entanglement—an entanglement outside the invalid's window,—but for what purpose?

She picked them up carefully, one by one, as many as she could find, and then clambered back over the sill into the room again. Once inside, she stood a moment and looked out. She had thought of a curious thing. A white-shirted arm, moving back and forth outside that window, could scatter tacks upon the rocky ledge just as these tacks were scattered! She sat down in the chair beside the bed, and looked at the outline under the blankets.

"Then you don't really think the noise last night was a mountain goat losing his balance and skinning himself?" she began severely.

The gray face appeared at once, and the eyes seemed to be twinkling almost humorously at her.

"No, nurse, I think it was somebody getting his Karma," he answered gravely. "I'm not above giving Karma a boost now and then when she moves too slow on the job. But I'll bet you five to one we get a good night's sleep to-night."

Mary Martha was glad she was only a nurse,

and not required to unravel the mysteries of this queer gray house by the river. Uncle Bob had expected an intruder,—had prepared his trap accordingly,—there had been the cry and the crash in the night, the creeping away and the moaning, —and this morning one of the Flesh-and-Bloods —Uncle Penny—was suffering from the effect of a serious fall! Well, these might be the facts, the whys were past her understanding.

Mary Martha said nothing further about the matter, but spent the morning as usual in the room with Uncle Bob, doing what she could to make him comfortable, and to keep him entertained, always striving to hold in his thought the image of perfect health.

It was nearly noon before she went down again and as she tripped through the hall, her feet were suddenly riveted to the floor and she shivered with a new and suffocating fear. From behind the closed door of the dining-room she heard a voice, a pretty, high-pitched, musical voice,—the voice of her sister Vivien!

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

MARY MARTHA, in the throes of a nameless horror, did not wait to hear the words, could not have understood them if she had heard, so stunned was she with fear. Vaguely, in place of the pure and wholesome thought-forms she so assiduously cultivated, danced maddening visions of calamity,—Teddy swept away on the bosom of the perilous rushing river; her father mangled and torn by the wild beasts of the mountains; the shingled shack mantled with fire and her dear ones nothing now but charred and blackened ashes. Mary Martha cried out in anguish, and ran forward, blindly staggering, throwing open the door to the room and swaying against it for support, white-lipped, stark-eyed.

"Tell me—what—oh, what—"

Great tears, of relief, of relaxation, even of anger welled slowly up into Mary Martha's blue eyes as she sank trembling into the nearest chair.

"I—I was frightened—" she stammered. "I am upset—"

For in the bright little room there was no appearance of calamity nor any suggestion of disaster. The first thing Mary Martha saw was Vivien—Vivien matchlessly arrayed in Mary Martha's own best Sunday blouse, her lovely dark curls drawn enticingly about her ears, the faintest dash of rouge on her exquisite skin, and her great eyes shining limpid and clear, wicked though they were, behind her silken fringe of lashes. Very brightly, with pretty enthusiasm, she was displaying her beauty products to Miss Kezzy and Aunt Tilly, while from his chair by the window Uncle Penny looked on with interest, and even Cousin Ben bent approving eyes on the lovely young pedler. In the farthest corner, his chair tipped back against the wall, tugging with enjoyment at his big pipe, his gray eyes as

quizzically keen at the moment as Uncle Bob's own, sat Steve.

Mary Martha dropped her head into her hands and burst into faint hysterical laughter. After her terrible fears, it was so ridiculous and so natural. Knowing Vivien as she did, she should have been prepared for something of the sort.

For to one of Vivien's romantic taste, it was nothing less than torturing that a quarter of a mile away, Mary Martha passed thrilling, delirious hours in a mystery cottage of lovely gray stone, catering to the whims of a charmingly eccentric old gentleman, pampered and petted by four astonishing Flesh-and-Bloods down-stairs, to say nothing at all of the handsome Steve,—although Vivien's calculations reckoned Steve first and foremost, as the one fleeting glimpse she had of him on the roadside showed plainly that he was of the very most irresistibly intriguing type of species male.

No wonder Vivien had flounced the dishes angrily in the water! Here she was, keeping

house like an old woman in this stupid wreck of a shingled brown shack, and up there such a little way—

Vivien was sorry now that she had not utilized her opportunity to drink deep of the Pierian springs of New Thought, Theosophy and Christian Science, such as would enable her also to meet the exigencies of Mary Martha's divinely demonstrated position, but it was too late to worry about that now. One thing was certain, she had no mind to sit here calmly twiddling her thumbs without so much as a peek within the house of mystery.

To Mary Martha, who knew her, Vivien must, inevitably, have reasoned after such a fashion. And when the first stunning shock of surprise had passed Mary Martha realized that since it was bound to come, it was as well to get it over.

Vivien herself, so far from being embarrassed by Mary Martha's appearance, was pleased that her sister had come to witness her cleverness.

She hastened to Mary Martha with her jar of cream.

"Ah, miss, you, I know, will be interested in the complexion cream I am offering," she said. "I use it myself every night I assure you, with the result that you can see. Look, ladies! By nature, I dare say the young lady's complexion is almost as good as my own, but see! Alas, for such neglect! Each night I use this cream, while the young lady has neglected to cleanse and to nourish.—See!" She mischievously thrust her own cheek close to Mary Martha's for comparison. And Vivien's skin even without the fine coating of powder and the dash of rouge, was quite incomparable.

"See now! That proves it," said Aunt Tilly firmly.

"My hair tonic, ladies. See,—the young lady's hair, though of exquisite texture and color, all flying disorderly, tangled." She looked at Mary Martha's golden curls with disfavor. "My own, see,—smooth, luxuriant, and glossy fine."

(Vivien indeed had always taken the greatest pride in her beautiful wealth of hair.)

"See? See that now!" approved Miss Kezzy.

And both women hurried away for their purses.

"Do you live near here, miss, or are you of a band of gipsies?" asked Mary Martha, determined to have some slight revenge for this humiliation in the presence of Steve.

A glint of appreciation of this thrust glowed for a moment in Vivien's bright eye. "Gipsies, lady, we are gipsies." She took up a tube of shaving cream and held it out to Steve. "Shaving cream, sir? It is wonderful."

"Do you use it yourself?" he asked lazily.

Vivien tapped him coquettishly on the shoulder, never heeding, but by no means overlooking Mary Martha's sudden alertness at the familiarity.

"You tease, sir, you tease the poor little gipsy. Shall I tell your fortune, sir?"

Mary Martha was frankly pleased that Aunt Tilly and Miss Kezzy returned at that moment.

"I suppose you can't cook, girl," said Miss Kezzy hopefully.

A sudden eagerness came into Vivien's face. "Cook?" she repeated, glancing speculatively at handsome Steve. "Surely, I can cook for the king's taste. Gipsies specialize on cooking, always."

"Our cook, Hezekiah," went on Miss Kezzy plaintively, "who was a slovenly nigger anyhow, and a good riddance, went off all of a sudden for no reason and we've had to do our own work, and we don't like it. If you'd like to come and cook for us a few weeks we'll pay you very well, indeed. Your folks could camp in the mountains, and you could sleep at home."

Vivien's mischievous face glowed with delight. She dropped dramatically upon one knee. "Oh, madame, you are an angel. So! You will let me cook. Oh, madame, how hard I will work for you." Again the lovely eyes strayed to Steve tilted in his chair against the wall. "A pedler! Ah, people laugh, people slam the doors, people

sick the dogs, people shout go away!" She closed her satchel of beauty preparations with a snap. "I shall be no pedler from this on. I am a cook."

Mary Martha tried in vain to freeze her with an icy eye; Vivien would not look. "And the poor sick man,—Ah, how I shall cook the heavenly food for him," she gurgled joyously.

Deeply pleased with any arrangement that would relieve her of burdensome and unpleasant work in the kitchen, and unmindful of the warning whispers of the men as to "trusting a gipsy," Miss Kezzy led Vivien at once to the kitchen, followed closely by Mary Martha. Miss Kezzy's one desire was to shift the distasteful task to other shoulders, and she felt that by confining the gipsy to the kitchen, and watching her carefully there would be no chance for theft. Besides,—it was not Miss Kezzy's house, and she kept her own valuables locked in her trunk.

In the kitchen, Vivien happily tossed her little flowered hat upon a chair, and hastened to stir

up the fire to show the zeal with which she entered upon her new duties. Miss Kezzy gave a few vague instructions about the preparation of dinner and cheerfully withdrew.

As soon as the girls were alone, Mary Martha closed the door and faced her sister sternly, but Vivien caught her about the waist, and danced her around the table gaily, but cautiously—a-tiptoe.

"Oh, Merry O! Isn't this a picnic? Isn't this a circus? Oh, aren't you glad I thought of it? And I'm going to flirt with Mr. Steve half the time, too, I give you fair warning. Isn't he beautiful?"

Mary Martha could not help laughing, in spite of the seriousness of their predicament. "Oh, Vivien, you awful thing!" she said. "Why didn't you tell me? It gave me a terrible fright."

"You aren't mad, are you, Merry O? I was afraid you wouldn't let me."

"But, Vivie, listen. You can't stay here. We'd give it away, in no time, and you can't cook—"

"I know. You'll have to do it for me."

"But I can't. It wouldn't look right, and they would get suspicious. And we can't act like anything but sisters, and we'll both be fired in no time. Think of the fifty a week, Vivie! It's hard enough anyhow, but with you right here in the kitchen,—Vivie, honestly, you can't."

Vivien hesitated, pouted, looked tearful, but presently yielded.

"I got to see them anyhow," she triumphed. "I got in slick enough, didn't I?"

"Yes, but how in the world will you ever get out—without giving everything away?"

"Oh, leave it to me. You've no imagination at all."

So Mary Martha set anxiously to work getting dinner for Uncle Bob, while Vivien began peeling potatoes. She peeled just two, piling the thick broad parings beneath her hand, and leaving only tiny scraps of the potato when she had finished. Suddenly she gave a loud hysterical cry that brought the entire family rushing

to the kitchen, even Uncle Penny hobbling after, on a stick. Vivien, with wild and tragic gestures, flung the potatoes about the kitchen, hither and thither, as fast as she could send them, crying all the while in a high voice, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Steve leaned against the door in the corner, his eyes, not upon the dramatic, hysterical gipsy, but upon the crimson face, the rigid line of scarlet lip, the sturdily lowered lashes of Mary Martha, who never stopped her work.

"I am a princess," shrieked Vivien. "I am the child of the queen of all the gipsies. I will not be disgraced by peeling potatoes! How dare you order me to do such menial tasks! Scrub the pans, mop the floors, polish the knives,—it is an insult!"

The dismayed and terrified relatives clustered in nervous bewilderment close beside the door. Vivien rudely brushed them aside, caught up her flowered hat and her satchel of beauty products, and ran passionately from the house and down the winding rocky pathway.

"I'll bet she stole something," prophesied Uncle Penny.

"G-g-gipsies are so t-t-temperamental," murmured Mary Martha, and then quite unable to restrain herself any longer, she dropped into a chair and burst into laughter.

"Nurses, too," assented Steve, drawing nearer to where she sat. "I've often noticed how temperamental they are, nurses and gispsies and such folks."

Mary Martha looked at him, quickly questioning eyes searching his steady ones, but Steve was smiling and tugging peacefully at his big pipe.

CHAPTER XV

NEITHER DEAD NOR SLEEPING

TRUE to the prediction of Uncle Bob, they had a peaceful night, and Mary Martha was inclined to believe his boost for Karma had been altogether effectual. While it scarcely seemed possible that all those strange and terrifying noises had been caused by the nocturnal prowlings of shy sanctimonious Uncle Penny, there had certainly been a sudden cessation of them, for which she was grateful.

Uncle Bob was much better in every way, yet in the course of the morning when Mary Martha again suggested exercise, he ventured his usual mild but anxious remonstrance. Mary Martha sat down on the bed at his side.

"Listen," she said. "Just put your mind on this for a minute. You are *afraid* to get up. That's all that ails you. You are afraid you will

strain your heart, and have another attack. That is what fear does to you. And unless you get rid of your fear, what you fear will happen, because you're creating your own condition. Remember what Job said,—'The thing which I greatly *feared* is come upon me.' Sure it did, that's why. Because he did fear it. It's in the Bible. Maybe you don't remember, for you probably weren't brought up on the Bible the way we were."

Long before Mary Martha reached this point, Uncle Bob was only visible in blanketed outline. She did not spare him.

"When you got interested in something else and forgot your heart, what did you do? Got out of bed all by yourself, rummaged around until you found a box of tacks and scattered them outside your window. It didn't hurt you a bit. You were so eager to boost Karma you forgot you had a heart. And it didn't hurt you because you forgot your fear."

Mary Martha paused again, to see if he wished to argue. He did not.

"Then you took a silly notion to go under the bed, heaven only knows what for, so you got up by yourself, and pulled this heavy bed out from the wall, and crawled under head-first hanging on to the blankets, blood circulating upside down, and everything—and even that didn't hurt you. Because you forgot to be afraid and had your mind on something else. But go right ahead if you like, and when it happens just quote the Bible to yourself and say with Job, 'The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me.' "

Mary Martha picked up a book and began to read, with never another word about exercise. Ten minutes later, Uncle Bob emerged of his own accord, and said, placatingly:

"I don't see as a little exercise would do me any harm, if you like, nurse."

And having turned his thought away from his heart, he walked two or three times around the room, holding her arm, and afterward sat in the window for half an hour with no ill effects. Then, evidently afraid she would take to herself and

her bewildering doctrines too much credit for this happy condition, he said crossly:

"Oh, I decided to get well anyhow. I want to live long enough to run out that gang of coffin-chasers down-stairs."

Quiet days succeeded one another, and there was happiness and harmony in the gray stone cottage on the rocks. To be sure, quite inadvertently, Mary Martha ran into a few curious minor incidents that were surprising, a bit amusing, and which she could not explain. One morning very early she came upon Aunt Tilly sitting on the floor in the hall examining the great bear-skin rugs which lay there. One night, running down to get a bed-time glass of milk for Uncle Bob, she was amazed to find Miss Kezzy on her knees inspecting the huge fireplace in the dining-room. And she was always running upon one or the other of them, or Cousin Ben, and once in a while even Uncle Penny hobbling about on a stick, in all sorts of queer places and secluded corners. But between Uncle Bob, who would not let her

out of his sight if he could help it, and Steve, who was always at hand to claim any idle moments, and her family in the shingled shack, she was far too busy to bother her head with the peculiarities of any mere Flesh-and-Bloods. So Mary Martha settled herself to a long and happy régime, at fifty a week; but this was a rash and unwarranted conclusion on her part.

It was her eighth day in the cottage, memorable to Mary Martha because it was the occasion of her second receipt of fifty dollars in advance for services to be rendered. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Steve, as he did every day, brought the mail from the box near the bridge and sat beside his uncle's bed reading his letters and such as there were of his uncle's, usually advertisements of fishing and hunting supplies.

"Say, Unc," he said suddenly, without looking up from the letter in his hand, "here's a notice from the government that they've had a new survey of this district. It puts us a hundred

yards farther north. The county agent posted the notices this spring, it says here."

Uncle Bob sat up quickly and in a tone of suppressed nervous excitement said:

"A—a hundred yards! A hundred—you mean they take off a hundred yards on the south, and— But, Steve, that'll take the shack down on the boulder, won't it? That's less than a hundred yards inside this old line."

Steve, not noticing his uncle's excitement, had continued with his letters. He nodded his head.

"Um, that takes the shack. This letter's from Joe Miller in Denver, enclosing the new survey. He's leased the twenty acres below, and is going to put up a hunting lodge on the site of the shack. He's sending a contractor up to draw the designs, but says if we want to move the lumber off we're welcome to. Or if there's anything he can use, he'll buy it.—You remember Miller, don't you, Unc?"

The old man was sitting up in bed, his chin drooping, his eyes wrinkled up and anxious.

"When, Steve? When?" he gasped, and his voice was hoarse.

Steve looked at him in quick surprise, and Mary Martha moved at once to his side and took his hand. He pulled it away, without a glance in her direction.

"When, Steve?" he repeated.

"Does it mean much to him?" interrupted Mary Martha quickly. "Does he feel badly about it? Perhaps you should not have told him."

"Why, it doesn't mean anything," said Steve promptly. "We built the shack down the river when we first bought up here. That was included in ours by the old survey, but we knew it wasn't just right. When we were ready to build a permanent place, we moved up here. It's a lot better location. We had some great old sport in the shack down there, just the same, didn't we, Unc?"

"He won't mind then," said Mary Martha comfortably.

"Oh, not a bit. If they cut off a hundred yards

down there, they'll give us a hundred more on the north. It's better. It will give us Knob Hill, the best hunting in the mountain."

Mary Martha settled back, and Steve went on with the mail. The old man had drawn beneath the covers of the bed, and did not emerge for fully half an hour. Certainly, when he came out, he looked older, grayer and thinner than when he had disappeared. Mary Martha stood beside him anxiously.

"When's he coming up? Miller. To see about building on the boulder?" Uncle Bob asked at once.

"He said immediately. But that may mean anything."

"It may mean to-morrow," said his uncle in a choking voice.

"Or it may mean next fall," assented Steve, laughing.

Mary Martha was concerned on her own account now. Her family was in comfortable possession of the shingled shack.

"What—will he do when he comes up?" she asked. "The contractor."

"They're going to tear down the shack," Steve explained. "They'll probably dynamite it. We just threw the shack together among the rocks, but they'll have to dynamite to put in a firm foundation for a good cabin."

"D—d—dynamite!" gasped the old man.

"Dynamite!" stammered Mary Martha.

She got up at once, intending to run down to the shack without delay, to put her father on his guard, but Uncle Bob turned suddenly refractory. He complained of a pain and insisted on having attention. He had some difficulty in locating the pain, but finally decided it was in the back of his head and Mary Martha sat down beside him and gently stroked it.

"You need never feel pain, you know," she said. "It is preposterous, it is unthinkable, that a child of God, made in His image, should be required to suffer physical pain. We were given *dominion,* if we choose to *hold* dominion. We

must drive away every such evil thought." Then, turning from New Thought to the formula of Auto-Suggestion, she murmured gently, "It's going, it's going, it's going," over and over again.

Hitherto this treatment had been efficacious for all his aches and pains, but to-day he snorted derisively when she talked and would not be pleased with anything. He told her roughly that she was pulling his hair out by the roots, and he wished she would leave him alone. He decided that exercise was what he needed and made them assist him to walk about the room. Then he complained that they walked too fast, evidently thought he was in training for a foot race, and when they went slower he declared that Steve was hanging on him. And suddenly he insisted on going back to bed, saying he was hungry and wanted his supper at once.

Mary Martha took his petulance good naturedly, accepting his impatience as final proof of convalescence, and hurried down to prepare his tray.

All during the evening he fretted and complained, holding Mary Martha to close attendance. She was glad when he at last announced that he was sleepy and wished she would go to bed and leave him alone. But even then he was not satisfied. He objected to her sleeping on the cot in his room, saying he was afraid to snore because he didn't want to keep her awake, and kept himself awake in the effort. So the cot was carried away to the attic room whence it had been brought, and Mary Martha moved joyfully into the cozy little room adjoining her eccentric patient's on the right, the room she had previously used to dress in.

Late as it was, she was tempted to run down to the shingled shack for a consultation with her father as to the future. But a glance out of the one small window her room afforded, the clamor of the water over its stony bed below, the rocks and mountains and pine-trees faintly outlined in the eerie moonlight, settled the question. She decided that nothing in the world was

of sufficient importance to tempt her to face alone the mysteries of such a night.

So she turned out the lights in her room, as well as those in the hall adjoining, and locked the door that led to it. The other door, the one connecting with Uncle Bob's room, she left wide open, that she might hear him if he called.

She lay awake a short while, tired as she was, listening to the ceaseless beating of the river, comfortable and much at ease in her wide bed after the narrow confines of the cot. Except for her uncertainty as to the fate of the shingled shack she was blissfully content, and in that happy frame of mind she fell asleep.

Something in the night awakened her,—something, some one, she knew not what. Quickly she drew her dressing gown about her, and sat, nervous, tense and terrified, although she had heard no slightest sound to justify her fears. Slipping from her bed, she made her way to the door of her patient's room, which she knew she had left open. It was closed. She flashed on

the electricity before she opened it and flooded the room with light as she entered.

She could hardly believe the thing she saw. Uncle Bob was not in his bed. The covers were thrown back. She ran her hand across the sheets and found them cold. He had not been there then for a long time. She looked in the closet, out upon the rocky ledge, down the long shadowy hall. He was nowhere to be seen. She was about to call for help when she was petrified as into a graven image by a sudden piercing scream from without.

"Merry O! Merry O! Merry O!"

Trembling with fear, she staggered to the window. A full moon was shining brightly over the dark boulders and the pines upon the hills. Up the roadway toward the cottage, flying on feet made light with wildest terror, came two slender figures, clad in shimmering white gowns —her sisters, Vivien and Teddy! "Merry O! Merry O!" their shrill young voices pierced the deep silence of the night.

Mary Martha forgot her patient, forgot his mysterious disappearance. Without hesitation she clambered over the window-sill out upon the rocky ledge, scrambling recklessly downward over the rough stones, regardless of bleeding hands and knees, and was off in pursuit of her flying sisters.

When Teddy, glancing up in her flight, saw the witch-like figure in the flying faded kimono bearing down upon them from the heights, she did not pause to reason whom or why, but turned from the road with a long despairing wail and plunged into the forest, where she flung herself upon the ground unable to struggle farther. Vivien even in her own madness did not forget her baby sister but turned back at once to rejoin her, and when Mary Martha reached them was vainly trying to lift Teddy to her feet.

"Run, run, run," she begged, "run, Teddy, we've got to run."

"Girls, girls," cried Merry O, frightened into utter panic by their strangely wild behavior.

At sight of her there in the forest, Vivien, now wholly hysterical, turned about, with both arms outstretched, poised for a farther flight into the depths of the forest. Mary Martha caught her arm.

"Stop that," she said sternly, although her teeth were chattering. "Don't be silly. What are you doing? What is the matter with Teddy? What are you running from? And where is father?"

Vivien, a total wreck, slid weakly to the ground, but Teddy, reassured by the steadiness of her sister's voice, flung herself upon her.

"G—g—ghosts," she stammered, in explanation. "G—g—ghosts."

Merry O scolded them, shook them, petted them, and finally succeeded in restoring them to a semblance of sanity so that at last, between them, they managed to tell their gruesome tale.

They had gone to bed, as usual, their father in his room, the girls in theirs. In the middle of the night they woke up cold with unreasoning fear. Together they crept to their father's room;

The ghastly figure of a man, holding a lantern

by the moonlight they saw he was not there. As they stood in listening uncertainty, they distinctly heard beneath them, footsteps, a sound of moving, a faint scratching among the pebbles in the cellar room below. Confident it was their father, thinking of nothing else, hand in hand, without a word, they had gone bravely down the steps of the inside stairway to the little rocky room among the boulders, further reassured by the fact that through the cracks in the floor, there showed a glimmer of light.

And then, half-way down, bare feet noiseless on the stone steps, Teddy cried out sharply, their hearts froze, their blood stood still. For in the little room among the rocks, they saw,—not their father,—but a terrible, ghastly figure of a man, holding a lantern before him. He wore, as nearly as they could remember, a loose white shirt open at the collar, corduroy trousers tucked into boots at the knees,—and he was a strange, wild, fearful creature! He stood with his back to them, his face set directly toward the huge boulder that

formed the north side of the room. One hand he held out before him as he walked toward the great rock.

When Teddy shrieked he turned, and—from that point in the story all coherence was lost. Teddy said he sprang at them, Vivien thought he vanished into the air, both agreed that whatever he did, it was ghastly. Their father gone, believing that in all the great mountains they had no one but Merry O, they turned instinctively toward her and fled in the direction of the stone cottage.

This was the story as Mary Martha made it from their hysterical recital. Vivien was still quivering, Teddy sobbing bitterly, and Merry O herself felt the clammy chill that comes from commerce with things unseen.

"Probably a camper looking for a place to sleep," she said as cheerfully as she could. "We must go back. We must find—"

And then, clasping both girls in her arms, Merry O dropped face downward into the brush,

the three of them a huddled, horrified group, for through the noisy rush of waters below they could hear swiftly running feet, pounding on the rocks, and crashing among the dry pine needles that covered the ground.

Teddy moaned beseechingly. Vivien fainted, a limp and lifeless figure in her sister's arms. Merry O bent above them, clasping them both to her breast, and waited for what would come.

CHAPTER XVI

A PROPOSAL, EN RAPPORT

HOURS, terrifying hours, it seemed they crouched there in helpless terror. The feet came swiftly closer, closer, and stopped. Then there was a great choking, soul-wrenching sob, then a broken exclamation.

"Thank God! Th—thank God! Th—"

And in a moment, they were in their father's arms.

They kissed one another, they wept, they shivered, they laughed, and when at last they could speak again, and could hear the words that were spoken, their father gave his version of the strange events of the night. Awakening suddenly, he had heard some one, or perhaps some animal, prowling about the shack below. A fumbling at the lock indicated the nature of the visitor. Mr. McAllister had hastily drawn on his

clothes, and with his gun hurried down the rustic outside stairway, just in time to see the wide garage door, the door of the "cellar-room," as the girls called it, swing open and a strange and grizzly figure aureoled from the light of a lantern, walk quickly in. Determined to know what the man was up to, he hid between the boulders, where, from this vantage-point, he could see the room plainly, as the door was left open. The strange apparition, if such it was, set the lantern down, crossed without hesitation to the huge boulder on the north side of the room, one hand stretched out before him,—and after that, the sudden, piercing cry of Teddy, the wild flight of the girls through the black forest, the panic-stricken father in pursuit!

"What became of—*it?*" whispered Mary Martha.

He did not know. When he saw the girls in flight toward the forest, he thought of nothing but them and waited for nothing further. His description of their mysterious visitor tallied with

their own,—a loose white shirt, an undershirt, their father said it was, gray corduroy trousers stuck into high boots, a thin, stooped, haggard figure of a man.

Quickly they set off through the woods returning to the shingled shack, and none too soon, for already the morn was faintly dawning. The lock their father had put on the lower door was broken off, and in the little cellar room the lantern was still burning feebly in the pale morning light.

"It can't be a ghost, you see," argued Mary Martha. "A ghost would not have a real lantern. A ghost's lantern would disappear with the ghost."

But no word of hers could convince the girls that the creature they had seen was really a thing of earth.

"But the broken lock," continued Mary Martha. "A ghost wouldn't stop for that. He'd walk right through."

Logic was well enough in its place, but this was not its place.

Nothing had been disturbed in the rooms upstairs. Timorously exploring, clustered together, finding a sort of courage in their number, they discovered everything exactly as it had been. The girls dressed hurriedly, and Mary Martha unearthed an old pair of shoes and a skirt that would serve until she could get back to her clothes in the stone cottage.

"You have to leave here to-day," she told them decisively. "A man is coming up immediately to dynamite the shack, and you must get away at once. I'll come back after breakfast, and help you pack. You certainly can't stay here another night."

The girls expressed their entire willingness to get away at the earliest possible moment, so Mary Martha set off for the gray stone cottage, hoping she might in some way win admittance without arousing the household, for she was quite unable to devise a fitting explanation for her absence and in such attire.

She was relieved to find the house seemingly

wrapped in silence and in slumber. She felt only relief, nothing at all of suspicion, when she saw the lower door standing open, and crept gratefully within and up the stairs.

As she had left her hall door locked, in her unexpected departure, she was obliged to tiptoe through Uncle Bob's room to reach her own. To her great relief, he was lying rigid and still beneath the blankets, and Mary Martha, rejoicing that her absence and her entrance and all her wild adventures of the morning were undiscovered, crept into bed again.

But Mary Martha did not know that as the door closed behind her, Steve stepped out from among the pines across the road where he had awaited her return, or that his kindly gray eyes were troubled.

She was strangely quiet that morning in her early attendance on Uncle Bob, helping him prepare for his breakfast. She was wan and worn, her arms were scratched and bruised, and for the first time her thoughts were far from her patient.

When he spoke suddenly, his sharp voice startled her, recalling her suddenly to the present time and place.

"D—do you believe in ghosts?"

Mary Martha looked solemnly down at the gray face on the pillow.

"Yes," she said promptly. "Do you?"

Evidently suspecting from her manner a latent antipathy to the subject of spooks, Uncle Bob thought it wise to retire beneath his covers without answer, and Mary Martha, having finished her work in the room, went down for his breakfast with never another word.

"It's a sign of death," was the sepulchral pronouncement that greeted her as she entered the dining-room. "Isn't it, Miss McAllister? If you see spirits floating past you in the middle of the night, it's a sign of death. How's poor Bob?"

"He seems very well. D—did you see s—spirits floating past?"

"They all scoff at it," Miss Kezzy went on re-

sentfully. "But I'm a religious, God-fearing woman, and when spirits see fit to appear to me from the world beyond, I know it's a warning."

"Tell me—what did you—"

"I heard a long wailing sound, a regular ghostly sound," Miss Kezzy declared, and she told her story with a fluency achieved from frequent repetitions. "It was a kind of an up-and-down sound, like a fire siren, and it sounded like it said, 'Mer—ry—oh, mer—ry—oh, mer—ry—oh.' Of course that doesn't mean anything in itself. Tilly, you needn't laugh." She did not notice that Mary Martha had flushed scarlet, nor know that her hands had turned icy cold, a nervous state not at all relieved by the fact that Steve's sober gray eyes were fixed upon her. "I think likely it's a symbol, or maybe a signal that spirits understand. Anyhow, it was that general up-and-down, wailing tone—'Mer—ry—oh, mer—ry—oh.' I can see the road from my bed, by turning over, which I did, and down the road came two spirits in long white flowing robes that faded away into nothing.

They weren't walking, you understand, their hands were outstretched and they were sort of flying—"

"How about wings?" Steve interrupted.

"I didn't really see the wings, not to notice 'em specially, that is, but maybe the flowing draperies hid 'em. The first was a little spirit, the second a bigger spirit, and seems like they was calling all the spirits to a meetin' or something. For the first thing you know off from the other side of the road another one came floating down, and went after 'em up the road, and they were all chanting the same: 'Mer—ry—oh, mer—ry—oh.' "

"She dreamed it," said Aunt Tilly scornfully. "There ain't no ghosts. She's always seeing something."

"Know anything about spiritualism, Miss McAllister?" asked Steve suddenly. "Got any books on ghosts, along with your other er—psychic raptures?"

"No, nothing." Mary Martha was glad to

busy herself with breakfast, leaving the others to debate whether spirits walk or only fly.

As soon as she had finished her morning's work, Mary Martha went into the woods ostensibly to meditate, but really, as soon as out of sight of the cottage, to hurry down to the shingled shack that she might speed their preparations for departure. Certainly they must immediately and irrevocably remove themselves beyond reach of the alarming mysteries that encompassed the stone house on the hill.

She found the girls already deep in their packing, their eagerness to be away from the shack overtopping even her own. Their plan was to leave the Ford in its temporary lodgment among the rocks, where, as it would not move under its own power, and as the road had long since been abandoned, it was plainly safe from predatory motorists. Mary Martha intended to deliver it into the kindly hands of Steve for mechanical ministrations, once the family was safely out of the way. They would, with all their worldly pos-

sessions, go down to the city that very afternoon on the two o'clock stage and find temporary, inexpensive lodgings where they would remain until Mary Martha had served out her nurseship.

She spent several hours helping them pack, and then, promising to be at the upper road bridge by two o'clock to wave them a last farewell, and cautioning them not to stop the stage to speak to her, as the road at that point was in plain view of the windows in the gray stone cottage, said good-by and hurried back to her work.

To her surprise she found Uncle Bob up and dressed and stalking grimly about the room, alone and unassisted. He said gruffly that he decided she knew what she was talking about when she said he wouldn't have another spell if he quit looking forward to one, and he had quit.

She praised him warmly, and then asked teasingly, "But how in the world will you shoot out of sight when you have no blankets to hide you?"

He looked longingly about, wishing for the

shelter of the sheets at that moment. Then he suddenly lowered his chin almost out of sight, into the soft collar of his shirt, and wrinkled up his eyes, tightly shut.

Mary Martha laughed at the exhibition. "Thanks awfully for the demonstration," she said. "Same general effect as an ostrich sticking his head in the sand."

At two o'clock, as she had promised, she stood on the bridge by the cross-road, sadly waving her hand as long as the stage was in sight,—sadly, yet glad to have her family safely away from the shingled shack, which now seemed even more mysterious than the gray stone cottage.

She cried a little when the stage had disappeared, for she felt very helpless and alone—not knowing that from a safe shelter Steve was watching her farewells. For a little while, she gave herself up to her loneliness and her regrets, and then, her sadness having spent itself, she dried her eyes and set off briskly toward the

house. Almost immediately she was joined by Steve.

"Miss McAllister," he began earnestly, "will you—would you—I think it would be an awfully good idea for us to get married. Don't you? It would—"

Mary Martha stopped short and stared at him.

"Why, Mr. Steve," she stammered confusedly. "Are you—you don't mean that for a proposal, do you?"

"Yes, that is what I mean it for. I intended to wait a little longer, but—" He laughed awkwardly. "What I mean is, it would make things such a lot easier getting rid of that gang at the house, and taking care of Uncle Bob,—and besides,—if—maybe there are—things—that bother you a little, you might feel more like telling me, if we were married."

Mary Martha caught his hand quickly. She was glowing. "That's lovely," she said warmly. "That's wonderful."

He laughed, yet more awkwardly. "Oh, I am —awfully er—crazy about you, too, you know. It isn't missionary work by a long shot. Everything in me just seemed to sort of—call out—to everything in you, the very moment I saw you."

She nodded, with ready understanding. "I know. It's our vibrations. I noticed it too. It's psychic phenomena. They call it *en rapport.*"

Steve wanted to put his arms around Mary Martha, to kiss the lovely red lips, to pillow the golden head upon his shoulder. But Mary Martha looked at him with such steadiness, with such friendly, implicit confidence,—he was thrilled, but he was deterred.

And Mary Martha said, "We'd better hurry. Uncle Bob is awfully fussy to-day, and I've been out so much."

They walked together rapidly and in silence to the very door, but as Steve put his hand on the knob, she touched his arm and said shyly, with an adorable flush that dyed her lovely face and throat.

A PROPOSAL, EN RAPPORT

"Oh, Mr. Steve,—I didn't—I didn't—reject you, you know." Steve had to smile at the naive assurance. "I—I just didn't answer at all."

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER OPENING DOOR

ASSUREDLY there was no accounting for the vagaries of Uncle Bob. With Steve's hand yet on the knob, the door opened suddenly and to their astonishment Uncle Bob himself confronted them, very gaunt, very gray, but full of a dogged determination quite unlike his former shrinking timidity.

"Get the car, Steve," he ordered curtly. "I've got to do a little errand."

Behind Uncle Bob in the doorway appeared now the exclamatory and expostulating quartette, the Flesh-and-Bloods.

"Flying right in the face of Providence, I tell you," declared Uncle Penny shrilly.

" 'Course, for all we know, maybe he wants to die, and be done with it," wailed Aunt Tilly.

"When you see spirits flying in the dead of night, it's a solemn sign of death," Miss Kezzy reiterated again and again.

Steve took hold of his uncle's arm. "Come along up to bed, Unc," he said firmly but with his usual gentleness. "You can get all the air you need from the window."

"I'm not looking for air. I've had too much air already. Air's all I do get, too, with my nurse that I pay a good salary to, and my nephew that might be showing me some attention at the point of death, both of 'em gallivantin' in the mountains. I reckon maybe you didn't hear me when I says, 'Get that car.' "

Steve turned helplessly to Mary Martha.

"Get it, of course," she said at once. "If he has set his heart on a little drive, it won't hurt him a bit. Maybe it will do him good. I'll go along."

For Mary Martha had noticed that Uncle Bob was wearing a pair of gray corduroy trousers, stuffed at the knees into high boots! She mar-

veled at her stupidity! Why had she not suspected this before?

A few minutes later, Steve tore around the corner of the house in his little black roadster, and they very carefully assisted Uncle Bob into his seat, although indeed he required small assistance. Every movement on his part now was marked with feverish energy and haste. Two bright splotches of red were burning in his cheeks and his gray eyes glittered fiercely. As they started slowly away, Miss Kezzy rushed after the car, holding out her own precious bottle of smelling salts as one last precaution. Uncle Bob tore it from her hand and flung it on the boulders beyond her, where it crashed into dust and splinters.

This reduced Miss Kezzy to abject terror, and she ran cowering back into the house, quite convinced that, at last, as she had expected, poor Bob was completely mad.

Steve drove carefully, and would have taken the upper trail across the bridge, which was much

smoother, but at the cross-road Uncle Bob indicated the lower turn.

"This is better, Unc," he remonstrated. "The rocks—"

"Ain't you got a few books, miss, on folks doing as they are told and not talking back? Let Steve read 'em," said Uncle Bob testily, and Mary Martha laughed as Steve took the lower road without further argument.

It was perhaps some twenty yards above the shingled shack that he told Steve to stop the car, and when this was done, the old man hesitated a moment, regarding them with speculating eyes. Presently he seemed to reach a decision.

"Steve, I want out. I'm going to walk down the road a piece, with my nurse here. You turn the car and pull up a little ways and wait for us."

"Why, Uncle Bob—"

The old man glared at him in sullen anger.

"But, Uncle, why not let me—"

"Because, I said for you to turn around and

pull up a piece, and I meant it." Without waiting for assistance, Uncle Bob got himself stiffly out of the car. Mary Martha followed, but paused a moment to wish that Steve was going with them on that errand "down the road." She knew now that Uncle Bob was about to repeat his vain errand of the night before, and while she rejoiced in her discretion at having hurried the family away to town, she hesitated nervously.

"I'm going," Uncle Bob called back indignantly over his shoulder, and indeed he had started stiffly down the road alone.

"Don't go far," Steve whispered. "Watch him. I'll be within call. Be careful."

"I think I said my nurse was coming along," called the old man again impatiently, for he was staggering weakly in the path.

Mary Martha ran quickly after him and steadied his steps with her strong arm, relieved to know that Steve would be watching and waiting, within sound of her voice, should she call.

As she expected, Uncle Bob turned heavily up

the steep path that led to the shingled shack, and entered the cellar room among the boulders. The lantern stood in a corner among the rocks where she herself had put it. With a forced lightness of tone, really in an effort to drive away her nervousness, she said:

"You forgot your lantern last night, didn't you?"

The old man gave her a straight steady glance, withdrawing his chin into his collar and squinting up both eyes.

"You're pretty smart," he said, chuckling mirthlessly. "You don't miss much, do you? No wonder you believe in ghosts." He kicked the lantern aside.

And then Mary Martha was sole witness to a strange scene. He glanced quickly about the room, stood at the foot of the stairway listening, evidently not forgetful of the startling apparitions that had descended the night before, and then he turned about, as the girls had said, and walked straight toward the huge boulder, almost

as though—a wraith indeed—he intended to pass directly through the solid mass. He stopped in the face of it—a huge gray solid slab—and extended his right hand, pressing it firmly against the surface of the stone.

Mary Martha, following his movements with deepest interest, could see no faintest scratch nor line to indicate the spot he touched, and yet, at his pressure, the very heart of the rock trembled and then moved slowly out from its place, disclosing a small secret safe most ingeniously fashioned.

Mary Martha laughed delightedly at this strange and unexpected dénouement, but even as she laughed the old man staggered back as from a blow, then pressing forward again, he bent down pitifully, thrusting both hands into the little cleft in the rock and when he drew them out, stared at them, unbelieving.

"Gone!" he cried, both hands outstretched before his face. "Gone! It is gone!"

Mary Martha ran to support him, flinging her

arm quickly about his shoulders afraid he would fall. Suddenly he straightened, and a grim, gaunt, ominous expression settled over his thin face. Again he pressed the rock, and the hidden door swung back in its place, with never so much as a scratch to show where it had been. The old man turned on Mary Martha, his sunken gray eyes sullen and fierce.

"You don't miss much, and that's a fact," he said cuttingly. "You got on to the hang of things around here in a hurry, I must say."

Mary Martha was appalled at his sudden change of manner toward her. As he started toward her in a sudden rage, she retreated quickly before him until she stood with her back against the wall.

"That's my money," he said in a low menacing voice. "It's mine. You give it here."

"Uncle Bob,—please—" she stammered.

The old man put his hand into his hip pocket and drew out a little square revolver. "I'm not going to shoot," he said scornfully, as she covered

her face with her hands and shrank from him. "I'm no fool. I won't shoot, but you never get out of my sight from this minute, until you give me every cent you took out of that cache."

"Uncle Bob," she said, more bravely since he had disclaimed all intention of using the gun. "Listen, I will tell you everything I know,—but I don't know a thing—"

"I don't care what you know. I don't want to hear any talking. I want that money. It's mine. I want the money and nothing else."

Mary Martha shook her head despairingly. "Money," she repeated. "I know nothing about any money. I don't know what you are talking about, I don't—"

"You knew about my lantern slick enough," he interrupted.

"Yes, because—"

"The money! Just give me the money," he broke in shortly.

Mary Martha gave way to tears and sobs, which grew heavier as she heard quick steps com-

ing up the rocky path outside, and Steve swung up into the open door.

"Steve, help me," she sobbed. But as he started toward her, his uncle quickly interfered.

"I ain't hurt her, Steve. Mind your own business. I'm not *going* to hurt her. Take us home."

"But—"

Uncle Bob's fearful, menacing eyes had never left Mary Martha's face. "You know what I want," he said. "You do as I told you, and you can get out, and the sooner the better. No talking. Just do as I told you and say nothing."

In silence, Steve holding Mary Martha's hand, they retraced their way to the car, the old man with the little revolver swinging loose in his hand, scorning to hold it aimed against her. Steve helped his uncle into the car first, and Mary Martha beside him.

"Listen, Unc," he said slowly, before he started the motor. "I don't know what's going on. I don't know what's happened. But I love Mary Martha. I'm going to marry her."

The old man wavered a little, but resolutely steeled himself again. "She's a slick one, Steve," he said. "She fooled us both good and pretty. You won't want her, when you know what I know." And then to Mary Martha, "It's your move now, miss. I've not another word to say."

Poor Mary Martha! So hopefully she had followed every trail where Fortune seemed to lead her, so jauntily she had crossed the threshold of every door as Opportunity held it wide! And this last opening door,—did it lead her trusting footsteps to a gloomy prison in the little stone house by the mountain river?

CHAPTER XVIII

A PRISONER OF FATE

THE return to the house was a humiliating one for Mary Martha who had started out so happily such a little while before. It was Steve now who assisted Uncle Bob, trembling and weak and scarcely able to stand, while Mary Martha was ordered to precede them, like a culprit in very truth. They were greeted with cries of surprise from the quartette of relatives awaiting their return, cries quickly changed to a deep and awesome silence as they saw the turn affairs had taken.

Sick, suffering as he was, the stern old man would not relax his vigilance until he personally saw to it that the door leading from Mary Martha's room to the hall was rigidly bolted and barred from without, so that her only means of exit from her room lay through his own.

The room which had been given to her was admirably adapted for prison purposes. It was small, and had but one window, which looked down on a sheer drop to the rocks and the rushing river two stories below, closing all hope of escape in that direction. And when Uncle Bob was finally persuaded to return to bed, he significantly placed the ugly square revolver within easy reach of his hand.

The tumult down-stairs was indescribable, but Uncle Bob vouchsafed no word of explanation, and from long knowledge of Steve, they well knew it was hopeless to look to him for information. Steve carried down word for his uncle that they were to get busy, and provide food for them all without delay, and that he and Mary Martha were to be served with trays in their rooms.

Once Uncle Bob called in to Mary Martha.

"I'll give you a thousand cash for the bag, nurse," he said hopefully.

"I never heard of any bag," she protested. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Five thousand, if you like, and not a word to any one," he pleaded.

Mary Martha could only shake her head. But she sat at her window, looking out at the shadows purpling the hills, above the riotous roaring of the river on the rocks below, and she breathed deeply, consciously inhaling courage, hope and faith. And she felt herself restored. After the first abandonment to fear and to wounded pride, Mary Martha was herself again. She had tried very hard, she had done her best in every way, and even out of chaos such as this, only good could come.

The dinner sent up by the Flesh-and-Bloods was not to his liking, used as Uncle Bob was to Mary Martha's fastidious catering to his taste. "I must say, I miss a good job of cooking," he muttered to himself discontentedly.

Mary Martha heard it and smiled. "Oh, well," she called in answer, "if you'd rather have a bad prisoner than a good cook, it's your choosing."

Upon the tray with her dinner she found a note

from Steve, who had been rigidly barred from her room by his uncle.

"Don't be afraid, Mary Martha. He won't hurt you, and I'll see you through. I'll go to town first thing to-morrow and get a license, and bring a preacher with me. We'll get married right away, and then he can settle his score with me."

Mary Martha kissed it, her first love-letter. She desired Steve at that moment more than anything else in the world, but she would not even think of escaping from the dilemma by marriage. It was her honor that was under fire. This puzzling enigma must first be explained. She had thought of trying to escape. Steve's note forever settled that. She would not run away, she would stay in the gray stone cottage, a prisoner if need be, for weary years on years, until events had acquitted her and she was free to marry Steve.

For, reviewing all the long way she had traveled, the entire tortuous road from New Paris, Iowa, to her little prison room above the

river, Mary Martha knew now whither all the leading had tended. It was to Steve, who waited for her at the end of the road.

Acting upon impulse she went in to Uncle Bob and told him her decision, hoping that the announcement of her plan to wait and to marry Steve, would induce him to give her the freedom of the house at least. But he was steadfast in his determination to hold her prisoner.

"You'll never marry my Steve," he said sternly. "Don't figure on it. Not Steve, when he knows what I know."

Mary Martha was positive. "Oh, yes, I will marry him. I've made up my mind."

"There's ways of changing women's minds," he said, and would add nothing further. In reply to her plea for information about "the money," "the bag" and the "cache in the rock," he turned a deaf ear.

"You know too much already," he said. "Just give me back what's mine, that's all I ask."

She noticed in him, as in many men of great

timidity and reserve, that in an emergency calling for decisive action every trace of nervous hesitation disappeared. His voice was clear, low and curt. His hands were steady. He no longer resorted to the blankets to hide a boyish confusion.

Before she retired for the night, she made one further effort to make her peace.

"Will you just let me tell you how I knew about the lantern?" she asked. "Just that much, Uncle Bob."

"I'll let you tell me where you put that money you took out of my cache," he said. "That's the only talking I want."

"Then will you confide in Steve?" she begged. "You know you can trust him. Tell him, and he will help us both."

"Steve's got to keep out of this. If there's any trouble—about my hoarding gold—it was none of his doing, miss, remember that." His tone was stubbornness itself, and what he said meant nothing at all to Mary Martha, who did not understand.

When she went to bed she patiently treated herself with every method she knew for insuring peace, serenity and confidence, but still she could not sleep. So she knelt beside her bed, in a broad shaft of moonlight from the window, and repeated, aloud but very, very softly, the Lord's Prayer, which she knew to be the never-failing panacea for all sorrow to any trusting heart.

In the morning, really prompted by force of habit, she hurried in to assist Uncle Bob as soon as she was dressed. His eyes were shadowed with black, his face was gray and drawn. Plainly he had not slept.

"I'm sorry. I'm awfully sorry," she said gently. "Will you let me—help you a little—the way I did before? You aren't afraid I will do you any harm, are you?"

"Well, seeing's I've paid you a week in advance, I don't know but I might as well work it out of you. My vibrations are—away below par," he admitted, and then, furious at his own facetious tone, he slid at once under cover.

Mary Martha was jubilant. He was weakening, she knew he was weakening. A little more softening, and he would open his heart to her. But her joy faded a little when he said sharply from beneath the blankets.

"Don't go to taking any liberties, miss. I got my gun under here, just the same."

Steve came up while Mary Martha was arranging the blankets of the bed. He too looked pale and haggard.

"How're you, Uncle Bob?" he said. "You look as if you'd missed your nurse."

Then, with boyish defiance, he crossed to Mary Martha's side, and held out his hand. When she put hers within it, shyly, he said, "Good morning, dearest," bashfully but with grim determination, and put his arms about her, and kissed her. Mary Martha clung to his arm, and cried a little, nervously.

"Steve," she whispered, "you believe me, don't you? I haven't done a thing, honestly I haven't —do you—"

Steve caressed her tenderly, pressing his lips against her golden curls, grateful that his uncle, with his wretched haggard eyes, remained below the sheets.

With rare consideration, he cleared his throat, gruffly, before he ventured out, and when he appeared, Mary Martha slipped tearfully away to her room to compose herself. Steve was wonderful, she told herself gratefully, he was wonderful, he was heavenly,—after all, it was worth everything,—the suspicions, the insults, the uncertainties, if in the end it opened the way to a life of happiness—with Steve.

In the meantime, Steve was trying to wheedle his uncle into reason. "See here, Uncle Bob, tell me what's up. Come on, be a sport. I've got a right to know. What happened in the shack?"

"I'm not talking, Steve, the time for talking's over."

"But what do you think poor Mary Martha—"

"I don't think anything—I know. When that girl comes across, all right, but until she does—"

"But you talk in riddles. I can't make head nor tail of it. Do you think Mary Martha is a thief?"

"If you can't make heads nor tails, it's as it should be. We'll keep it there. It was my doings in the beginning, maybe I was wrong, I'm not saying. Just remember, you saw nothing, you heard nothing, and you did nothing. Remember that."

"Unc, you know if there's any trouble ahead of you, I'm right with you. What hits you, hits us both. But if it's only trouble for her, for Mary Martha, I am going to marry her."

Uncle Bob slid desperately out of sight, and Steve went slowly down-stairs. He had eaten no breakfast, but immediately they heard the low thrum of his roadster and in a moment saw the black car tearing out to the road in a streak of dust.

Her equanimity quite restored, Mary Martha tenderly assisted Uncle Bob with his breakfast, read the head-lines of the morning papers to him,

though he heard not a word of it, and then helped him to the chair beside the window.

"You have your good points, all right," he acknowledged grudgingly, as she deftly tucked a pillow behind his shoulder.

"I'm going to be so good to you, you'll have to love me," she declared. "It would be awful if you didn't love Steve's—wife," she hesitated, flushing rosily over the word, and Uncle Bob, having left the shelter of his blankets, sank quickly into his collar and squinted up his eyes.

The emotions of the Flesh-and-Bloods were indescribable. To know that strange, mysterious, momentous, dreadful, perhaps even murderous projects were being carried out right over their heads, and they kept huddled below like silly sheep, was more than the Born Relations could endure. All during the morning they kept up a heated discussion as to a reasonable method of approach to the seat of action and at last in a body decided to stand upon their rights of relationship and demand a full explanation. After

which, they could sit in judgment as a board and decide whether things were right and lawful.

So all together, Uncle Penny still hobbling on a stick to spare his bruised ankle, they trooped up the stairs, Aunt Tilly, Miss Kezzy, Cousin Ben and Uncle Penny, the women well in the lead, as women by rights should be. Twice on the way they stopped to discuss the advisability of this approach, but finally, with a brave assumption of courage, they sailed down the hall and clustered at the open door of the sick room. Uncle Bob was lying flat in his bed, and beside him Mary Martha, in a low chair, was carefully filling his pipe with tobacco.

Uncle Bob, seeing them at the door, shuffled his shoulders more squarely down on the pillow, and with seeming carelessness, but deadly significance, shoved the little revolver into plainer view.

"Bob—Brother Bob," began Aunt Tilly, fluttering like a hen in a drizzling rain, "Brother Bob, we've a duty to—"

"Cousin Bob, we've decided to stand on—"

"It's not as if we were strangers, Bob, being flesh and—"

The old man suddenly squinted through his revolver at the group in the door. "Any choice as to which goes first, nurse?" he asked hoarsely. "Just state your favorite. I'm a good shot."

They retreated at once in disorder, but beyond the range of the bed stopped to revive their shattered morale.

"He won't shoot."

"He don't dare shoot."

"I bet it's not loaded anyhow."

"He's too sick to shoot."

They fluttered back, more feebly. "Brother Bob," said Aunt Tilly anxiously. "One thing I've got to say, one and only one. If you told that chit of a child where you hid the fortune instead of telling tried and true blood relations, born and bred, well, dying's too good for the man that would do it."

There was a sudden sinister lowering of Uncle Bob's heavy gray brows, and his sternness

brooked no further liberty. Abashed, with smoldering rage, the relatives were put to flight.

"I didn't tell you of my own will," he said bitterly, when they were alone, "and yet I'd have sworn I could trust you. You!—You, who cleaned the cache."

His voice broke, and he slipped beneath the blanket. Mary Martha put her hand on his shoulder comfortingly, with tender sympathy. He brushed it angrily aside.

"Go to your room and stay there," he ordered, and very sadly she obeyed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECRET OF THE STONE CACHE

IT WAS but a little after noon when the black roadster in its accompanying cloud of dust whirled back up the narrow road to the cottage, and almost before the motor was silent Steve was in the house and up the stairs. He did not even see the humiliated, wounded, wondering group of relatives, in his haste to reach his uncle's room.

"I want Mary Martha," he said, without preamble as he entered, and called her name.

She came in timidly, and looked with diffidence toward the stern old man who had banished her such a little time before, but he offered no objection to her presence.

"I got a license, Mary Martha," Steve explained quickly. "So we can get married. The minister was not at home, but I left word for him to come here as soon as he gets back. It may be

late this afternoon, but he will be here to-day. Is that all right?"

The old man stirred nervously on the bed, picking at the blankets with fingers that trembled.

Mary Martha shook her head. "I love you, Steve,—I forgot to tell you before. I love you —very much. I think you're perfectly wonderful." Her lips were quivering. "I'd rather marry you than anything else in the world. But I can't —until your uncle knows he is making a mistake."

"But, Mary Martha, let me settle it for you. Marry me, and then the reckoning—"

She shook her head more firmly. "I will not go away," she assured him. "They couldn't drive me away. I don't know what can have happened to change him so, but whatever it is, I had nothing to do with it. And as soon as your uncle knows this, then—I'll just love to—do it, if you still want me."

"Steve, you can't marry her. I did a— Well, you might say I made a fool of myself, in a way.

Anyhow it was unpatriotic. But I'd been through one spell of hard times, and I swore I'd never go through another, and I swore I wouldn't let you, Steve."

Steve dropped into a chair beside the bed without a word, motioning Mary Martha to do the same. He knew his uncle, and realized that only by letting him follow the impulse of the moment would they ever get to the bottom of this mystery.

"I had some land and houses, you know about that. But come hard times, you can't get money on land and houses. You young folks don't know what starvation hard times is like. It's only us that went through 'em. When the war began they said, 'Everybody turn in your gold.' But long before that, I was getting ready, before we ever got in the war I saw it was coming, and I was working ahead. I got all I could together, gold whenever I could work it, and silver, turning everything I could into cash.—I was slick about it, Steve, dragging it together a little at a time so they wouldn't catch on to what I was

doing.—That was for you, Steve. I thought when you come through the war, you'd have to have something to start on if times were hard like we figured."

He spoke slowly, Uncle Bob, and his voice was feeble, but steady. He seemed relieved that at last he was in the midst of a confidence. Steve sat motionless at his side, his sympathetic friendly eyes upon his uncle's face, and Mary Martha almost held her breath, so fearful she was of breaking the spell.

"You can see she don't love you, Steve," he went on. "She'd never hold out on you if she loved you, for anybody'd know that what I had was for you. Well, I got it together, a bit at a time, a nice lot, a hundred and thirty thousand, Steve, mostly gold and silver, but of course some notes, and I put it in a leather bag. I made that bag myself, Steve, out of that first leather hunting coat you had, and that you outgrew in no time. It made a good bag. I had a cache—I made that cache myself, too, Steve, I wasn't trust-

ing a thing to outsiders. I made it right in the solid rock, Steve, to work on a spring, in the big boulder down below the shack where we kept the car. Nobody'd find that cache, Steve, in a million years. I worked on it months getting it just right."

He closed his eyes, and lay very still for a moment, while his breathless auditors sat spellbound.

"Well, when we come up here, I left it there. I didn't have a cache up here in the first place, besides by then there was rumors going around that I was misering gold, and you know how a miser draws spies. I figured that anybody'd naturally expect a miser to carry his bag along with him. So I left it there in the boulder. That's where I fooled 'em, and a good job, too.—A good job, until *she* come.—But I began, kind of gradual, fixing up another cache up here, like the one down there. Cute, too, Steve, better than the other, it will be when it's finished.—Only now there's nothing to hide.—It opens two ways, Steve, the new one, outside the window in the

rock, and another spring that works in the wainscoting under my bed, so I could swing it two ways in a pinch.—That's why I was under the bed, nurse, that morning, looking to see if anything had touched it off, accidental."

His voice was much weaker, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead. Mary Martha looked pleadingly at Steve, fearing the effect of further effort, but Steve shook his head sternly, determined to get the last thread of the story.

"Well, then I had that nasty spell, and that gang down-stairs come in on me waiting for my remains. But I said nothing to any one, waiting to get myself together. But the day I had that bad attack, I thought I was a goner, and I knew nobody'd ever find the money in the cache down there, Steve, and it seemed I'd just cheated you out of your chance. I tried to tell them. I said 'The money—the money—I hid it—' And that minute I toppled over like dead, and didn't come to for three days.

"Well, you know the gang, Steve. They all

began clamoring and sneaking and prying around to find where I hid it, but when I saw I made fair to pull through, I told 'em nothing. I wrote it on a paper for you, Steve, in case I died unexpected, and sealed it, and I've had it right here in my shirt from that minute. But I told nothing to any one. I just waited my time. But Penny had sort of got next to me working about in the rocks on the ledge, and he come pryin' up there nights feeling his way. But I didn't know then if it was Penny or Ben. I heard him that night—that's when I heaved your book, nurse, and scared him away. And then I put tacks out to catch him unexpected, 'cause I knew he had to be prowling sock-footed,—and I caught him fair enough, miss, as you know.

"See, Steve, I figured on getting it up from the cache, and disposing it about careless-like, part in the new cache here, some in one bank, some in another, and some of it put into bonds, before you come into possession, so if any one did get suspicious and check up on me, and find I'd been

holding it out through the war, they couldn't fix it against you. That's why I said nothing one way or the other, Steve, there's such a thing as being too frank and outspoken, and I knew if you knew nothing you couldn't admit anything. But when we got word the government had cut off the shack in the new survey, and that Miller was planning to build on the boulders, I was in a sweat to get the money."

His voice faltered, and he moved his fingers weakly, faintly.

"Steve, please," begged Mary Martha. "He's not able. Let it wait till to-morrow."

Steve put his arm around his uncle's shoulder, and took his weak hand in his strong clasp.

"Yes, Unc," he said gently, "take it easy. Talk as slow as you like,—but go on, Unc."

"I knew then, sick or no sick, I had to get down to the cache for the money, 'cause if they set to blasting as you said, they'd blast our gold to Davy Jones.—She was too slick for me, Steve.—I don't know—how she got it out of me, maybe I talked

in my sleep, maybe she hypnotized me from those books she's always quoting and those charms she keeps muttering under her breath, I don't know. —She went down at night—she was out hours that night, Steve, you know it.—I saw you waiting across in the pines till she came.—But somehow, she bu'sted the cache, and got the gold.—There's the land left,—you can have it,—but I've not got five thousand in cash to my name."

He closed his eyes again, half fainting, and Mary Martha looked reproachfully at Steve.

"How could you?" she whispered.

Mary Martha's only thought now was for the exhausted, miserable old man. She quickly loosed the collar of his shirt, sent Steve hurrying for ice and cold water, and set to bathing his forehead.

It was several minutes later when he opened his eyes, and his blue stiff lips parted feebly. On opposite sides of the bed, Mary Martha and Steve were tenderly chafing his wrists. His glance wandered from one to the other and again his eyes closed.

"I can tell where I was that night," Mary Martha said gently. "And I can prove everything I say. I will do this,—but not now.—Poor Uncle Bob's had all he can stand for a little. I knew nothing of the cache in the shack, or about the bag of money.—Oh, don't talk now."

After a short while, Uncle Bob revived somewhat but continued weak and inert. At four o'clock, Mary Martha sent Steve down-stairs to get him something hot and stimulating to drink, while she stood at the window looking out, waiting for his return, wondering.

The cache in the rock had been most ingeniously conceived and executed. Who had discovered it, and by what means?

She saw, far down across the bridge, the great motor-bus coming up from the city. It stopped, sounding its shrill siren to denote the discharge of passengers. From that distance, Mary Martha could distinguish no one, but observed with vague surprise that there were several getting down from the bus. She wondered, half humorously,

if it could be a further relay of Flesh-and-Bloods to "wait for Uncle Bob's remains."

She idly watched the little group, as it crossed the bridge and took the road toward the cottage, —two girls, a man—drawing nearer and nearer. Mary Martha turned pale and clasped her hands together in a new anxiety. She did not believe it, she wouldn't believe it,—and yet the fact revealed itself before her bewildered eyes. Coming up the narrow road between the pines, happy faces set toward the little stone house that sheltered Mary Martha, came her father, Vivien and Teddy, their steps eager and unhesitant, their very air expressive of joyous glad assurance.

"Go back! Go back!" called Mary Martha, forgetting the man on the bed behind her.

They could not hear, but the movements of her hands as she tried to make them understand her meaning, attracted their attention. They cried out eagerly at sight of her, and hurried the faster up the steep path below.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN SPIRITS WALK

MARY MARTHA turned hurriedly toward the door, but was stopped at once in her intended flight.

"Come here," said the old man sternly, and the exhaustion and the faintness seemed to fall from him with the need for decisive action.

"I have to go down. My father has come to see me, and my sisters."

"That's good. They can see you here. Anyhow, they won't get a chance to carry away the booty. Come here."

Mary Martha was forced to yield, and crouched ignominiously in a low chair beside the bed, waiting the arrival of her family to witness her disgrace.

Meanwhile, below, it was Vivien who confi-

dently led the small procession up to the house and faced Steve and the bewildered group of flesh and blood relations. It was to the former that she, with jaunty effrontery, addressed herself.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Steve. Wasn't it a good joke I played on you all about the gipsy? This is my father, Mr. McAllister, the Reverend Mr. McAllister, and my sister, Teddy, Mr. ———. Oh, I don't believe— Why, I don't think I ever heard any name for you but Mr. Steve," she said, laughing gaily.

"My name is Holloway.—Did you say, McAllister?"

"Yes, McAllister, the same as Merry O.—Oh, hasn't she told you yet?—I am her sister, and father is her father, too, of course, and Teddy is her sister the same as mine. We're all McAllisters."

"You—you mean—you are—Miss McAllister's —father, and—sisters? Her own family? You are!"

He caught Mr. McAllister's hand, and wrung it fervently, beaming at him and at the girls.

"You are! Well, well. You just got here in time—for the—for everything! Why, how do you do! I'm certainly glad to meet you.—McAllister, yes, yes.—How do you do?"

The astonished McAllisters were overwhelmed with his surprising exuberance. Mary Martha had described him as a very quiet, self-contained, reserved young fellow. There was certainly nothing quiet or reserved in the reception they received. He only stopped shaking hands with their father to greet the girls and promptly shook hands with their father again.

"We came to get Merry O," said Vivien, almost out of breath with the hand-shaking and the warmth of the greetings. "We don't want her to work any more. Will you call her?"

Steve seated them with feverish solicitude for their comfort before he went up to summon Merry O. His effervescence was quickly quenched in his uncle's presence.

"Fetch 'em up, fetch 'em up," was all the old man had to say in reply to his request for Mary Martha.

There being nothing else to do, Steve went down reluctantly, abashed and apologetic, and said nervously:

"A very— I am sorry to say— There has been— As a matter of fact, your daughter has had a slight misunderstanding with my—er uncle, and he—is a very sick man indeed,—and he—will not permit her to leave his room. Will you—er—come up? And be—be kind,—be generous—don't be surprised at anything. Remember he is very old and sick."

Steve led the way up-stairs, followed by the unfortunate Flesh-and-Bloods who fondly hoped to be overlooked in the general entrance of such a number of visitors. But they were doomed to disappointment, for at the door of the room of mystery they were dismissed by Uncle Bob with just one glaring order from one gray eye.

Mary Martha hastened to throw her arms

about her father's neck, half laughing, half crying as she clung to him, while Teddy and Vivien, with girlish interest turned first of all to look at the figure of the gaunt old man upon the bed, of whom they had heard so many astounding things.

Teddy flushed crimson, paled and clutched suddenly at Mary Martha's hand.

"L—l—look," she stammered. "It's the g—g—g—ghost!"

As they turned in consternation at her exclamation, Vivien nodded affirmation, backing away from the bed while her eyes grew wide and dark. "The very g—g—ghost," she repeated, "who showed us the f—f—fortune, which was very—"

"Showed you the—what?"

But the old man sat up quickly, with the curt precision which characterized him in a crisis.

"Stop right where you are," he ordered. "Wait! Sit down all of you, and talk one at a time. Nurse, come here and sit by me. I've seen those girls before."

Mary Martha went at once and sat on the far-

ther side of the bed as he indicated, while Teddy shuddered back on her father's knee, peering with awed and fearful eyes at the gray gaunt face of the old man.

But Vivien had recovered a little of her courage. "Merry O," she whispered, "is—is that the —the old man, Uncle Bob, you told us about,—who slides beneath the blankets?"

Steve laughed aloud, and Uncle Bob looked sheepish and as if on the verge of an immediate disappearance, when he remembered and retrieved himself.

Mary Martha nodded.

"Because," said Vivien, "he's been fooling you. He isn't a man at all. He's the gray ghost who came to the shack that night and showed us where to find the fortune in the rock."

Mary Martha sprang to her feet.

"Vivien, you are crazy—what—"

Uncle Bob held out a thin gray hand to Vivien. "Come here," he said curtly but not unkindly. "Now, do not be afraid, but tell us what you

mean. Come here." She put her hand rather timidly in his and was drawn close to his side. "The gray ghost who showed you where to find the fortune," he repeated.

Vivien was puzzled, a little embarrassed at the attention centered upon her, but she was no longer afraid.

"You—you *are* a man, though, aren't you?" she said. "Or are you? Teddy and I both thought you were a ghost, and father did too, I am sure, though he was ashamed to admit it."

"Tell me," said Uncle Bob.

"Why, we just went to bed—"

"No, no, tell me what you were doing in my shack."

Vivien looked inquiringly at Mary Martha. "Did Merry O— Shall I tell him— Is it *your* shack?"

"Tell him everything, Vivien, the whole story, just as it happened," said Mary Martha. "Go right back to New Paris, and bring us out from Iowa."

Before Vivien could speak, Steve crossed quickly to where Mary Martha sat.

"Before you begin," he said, "I want you all to understand one thing. No matter what has happened, no matter where she has been, or what she has done, I am going to marry—your Merry O. Now go on. But keep that thing clear in your mind. I am going to marry her to-night."

Teddy sat up to look at him, childishly bright and eager.

"Oh, Merry O, did you get him on a string with twenty knots?" she demanded.

Merry O joined the laughter.

"No," she admitted, "I just expected the best thing in the world, and I got Steve."

Her father bent searching, studying eyes upon Steve's honest face, but Vivien was already launched upon her story.

As Mary Martha had directed her, she went back to New Paris, to the church first of all, the little ramshackle cottage at the edge of town, and Mary Martha clerking in the Emporium. Then

she recounted the journey west, Mary Martha's blind following where Divine Love seemed to lead, her efforts to get work, her failures, her humiliations.

"We got as far as the shingled shack," she said steadily, looking straight into the deep gray eyes fastened upon her, "and the car wouldn't work. So we camped beside the road, and Merry O came ahead on foot to try to find a mechanic.—Is the car still down there, Merry O?—But she didn't come back for hours, and we were awfully frightened. But she said Divine Love had given her a beautiful job at fifty dollars a week, and that is quite a lot of money, you know. So we arranged to camp in the shingled shack and wait until Mary Martha cured you. We—aren't really very—er—rich, you know, and rather—needed the money. That is, we did then. We don't now," said Vivien joyously.

"We knew we had a right to be there, because there were signs up on the trees saying it was part of the national forest reservation, and of

course we had as much right to visit the government as anybody else. So we camped, and every day Merry O came to see us, and told us about you, and Mr. Steve, and the funny Flesh-and-Bloods. And that brings us up to night before last.—That wasn't so funny," said Vivien reflectively, but added, brightening, "Of course it turned out well, but it gave us a terrible fright."

"Night before last," encouraged the old man, "go on, my dear. It's night before last I want to know about."

"Well, we went to bed, Teddy and I in our room, and father in his, and all of a sudden we heard a noise down-stairs and we thought maybe it was a bear or something and went to get father to shoot it, and he wasn't there. Then we heard some one walking down there, and saw a light through the cracks, so we thought it was father, and we went down, and it was a ghost." Then she added apologetically, "That is, we *thought* it was a ghost,—you looked awfully *like* a ghost, you know,—excuse me.—"

"Never mind, Vivie," put in Mary Martha, half laughing. "He thought you and Teddy were ghosts, too."

The old man slid at once under the sheets at their banter, to the intense enjoyment of Teddy and Vivien, who had longed to see this operation. But immediately, in his eagerness to hear the rest of this surprising story, the gray eyes returned to the pillow.

"Of course, we were afraid of the ghost,—I mean, *you*,—I mean, we didn't know *what* it was, but we were afraid. So we ran up here and called Merry O, and she came out and caught us, and pretty soon father came up and we all went back.

"But listen! This is the big part of the story, so pay attention to it particularly!" said Vivien importantly. "When we saw the ghost,—I mean *you*,—he was walking right straight toward the big rock in the cellar room, as if he intended to walk right through it, and we thought he did. He had one hand stretched out in front like this,

—I mean, *you* had. We both noticed it, didn't we, Ted?"

Teddy mumbled an unintelligible agreement.

"Well, Merry O made us pack up and go to town on the stage, because she felt nervous to have us in the shack since it was haunted, and because some other man was going to dynamite it anyhow, and what with being haunted and dynamited besides, it was no place for us to live. So we packed up.—But oh, Merry O, listen to this! This is what you don't know, and it is the best part of the whole story. We had finished packing, and were waiting for the stage, and Ted and I were down in the cellar room, and I said, just in fun, 'Look, Ted, this is the way the ghost went through the rock.' Just in fun, it was, I never thought of anything else. I put out my hand and shut my eyes and walked across to the big rock,—all in fun, you know,—and the minute I touched it— What do you think?"

Vivien paused dramatically to let the climax of her story gain weight.

"Just as I touched it, all of a sudden, a little door of the rock shoved right out, and there was a hole behind the door, and in it there was—Guess! Oh, Merry O! A great bag of money, gold and silver. Oh, thousands and thousands of dollars!"

At this the old man turned suddenly and held out a hand to Merry O, and as she slipped hers into it warmly, forgivingly, he whispered:

"You know I said right along you had your good points, nurse, I mean, Merry O."

Vivien, being urged, came at last to the end of her story. "Well, then, of course, we knew right away the kind old ghost had come on purpose to reveal the fortune—I mean, *you* did.—I mean, we *thought* you did. You *did,* didn't you? —You see, we *expected* something wonderful to happen. Merry O told us to keep expecting it, and we did,—and it happened, you see. It's an awfully good system, Merry O. I'm sorry I laughed at it, and I'll learn all the books by heart. Well, Merry O had told us we mustn't stop the

stage by the bridge to say good-by to her, because you could see from your window, so we had to go on to town without telling her. But we just couldn't bear to let the poor thing stay out here, not knowing how everything had turned out just as she said, and working and slaving, —and so to-day we got right on the stage—what do we care for expense?—and came out after her. Of course, we're very rich now, and she mustn't work for a living."

Steve took Mary Martha's hand and pulled her to her feet. Then she was in his arms, and the face she lifted for his kiss was wet with happy tears.

CHAPTER XXI

IF YOU WILL BE ORTHODOX

THE real history of the fortune of the stone cache was at first heart-breakingly sad to Vivien and Teddy, but after a time Uncle Bob succeeded in driving away their regrets by the extravagant plans he made for a fusion of all their futures and fortunes.

"First thing is to get rid of the Flesh-and-Bloods," he said. "My Flesh-and-Bloods, I mean. Merry O's don't seem so bad, one way and another.—But now that my boy Steve, and my nurse Merry O, and, of course, myself, are going to celebrate our honeymoon, with all of you McAllisters as guests of honor, there won't be any room for any outside Flesh-and-Bloods, as I see. And then we'll just spend the summer right here, where it's good and healthy, and Merry O'll have a chance to finish curing me."

He was a little vague as to the future, but so thrillingly generous in intent, that the McAllisters were well content.

Mary Martha was particularly happy. Out of all the confusion and the contradictions of all the books, out of all the incomprehensible mysteries and the deep philosophies, her eager feet had struck on solid rock. It isn't the method, —it is the faith. And those with their Science, those with their Theosophy, those with their New Thought, those with their Auto-Suggestion, and those, like Mary Martha, with their broad blending of everything good within range of their understanding, are all struggling on toward Truth, each along his different, diverging pathway. And those who never falter, never doubt, must all come out at last into happiness, and health, and love.

"And for those like father," said Mary Martha when she was explaining her depth of understanding to Steve, "those like father, who've got the habit so they just can't get over being strictly

orthodox—they can scramble along in their own way and come out with the rest of us in the end. That is, 'if they have faith to be healed,' like it says in the Bible. But perhaps you don't remember, Steve; of course you weren't raised on the Bible as I was."

And Mary Martha found the proof of all her arguments, the justification of all her trusting faith and the eternal banishment of every lingering regret for the hardships of the road she had traveled, in the sweet ecstasy of Steve's adoring kiss upon her lips.

THE END

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